

ESA President's Report

2009-2011

Anália Torres

Let me start by saying that these last two years were very intensive and that I am very grateful for all the support I got from all and especially, of course, from the Executive Committee and from our secretary Gisele Tchinda.

As many of the decisions and actions we implemented are already documented in our newsletters and in all the documents produced in these two years I will sketch very briefly what I think were the main strong points and also some of the weakness that ESA's need to overcome in the future.

1) We had targeted the need to clearly increase our membership. I am very glad to confirm that the policy drawn in Lisbon – to make the prices of the conference for members significantly lower than for non-members – was correct. It had as an out put doubling our membership, in Lisboa and even increasing it much more in Genève. So this was a successful policy that I wish the next executive and president will continue.

Its goal is not “numbers” – though of course they are also important – but mainly to make ESA a really representative Association of Sociologists in Europe where, as I said in my presidential proposal “to make our association a more inclusive space, recognized by each European sociologist as its natural home, a rich and diverse meeting place of exchanging knowledge and lively discussions”. The huge growth in our membership, the diversity of countries involved, show that we are much closer to this goal now than we were two years ago.

2) To be a successful association you must **first of all** be close to the members you represent. In this direction, and continuing the work initiated by Giovanna Procacci and then followed by Claire Wallace I gave particular attention to our connections with the Research Networks and to the National Associations. With the help of the RN Committees chairs' Consuelo Conradi and Thomas Eberle we draw a policy that gave more and more structure and representation to RNs

within the Executive. One of its important consequences was a proposal of change in the statutes that I hope we will approve in this General Assembly.

With the help of Roberto Cipriani and Pekka Sulkunen we organized for the first time in ESA's history a meeting with 24 national associations represented. Besides telling us about NAs history and needs the meeting could also count with the intervention of Social Science European's Commission representatives talking about European Research programs and targets.

From this meeting came out a Memorandum of Understanding that sealed mutual commitments between ESA and NAs. And also some proposals of change in our statutes.

3) We succeeded also in renewing the Editorial Board of *European Societies* as well as supporting its new Editor Goran Therborn. With the rise of the membership we were beginning to have serious problems with the high amount of money we had to pay to the publisher, as we offer our members the journal. Fortunately we were able to negotiate financial arrangements that turned out well for ESA's best interests.

4) Besides being close to their members, as a condition to represent them well, we also need to be heard, respected and recognized as the voice of sociologists in Europe.

In January this year we took a stand "Against the downsizing of social science in Europe", questioning and contesting EC scientific policies, addressed to the Director of the DG research in the European Commission, Robert Yan Smith. He responded to our letter recognizing us as privileged interlocutors on our field. We also signed, with other national associations, a common position regarding the Green Paper. These external positions were also accompanied by our regular participation in *Initiative for Science in Europe* a bottom-up organization of scientists in Europe that gave origin to the European Research Council.

These external stands gave visibility to ESA and show our commitment to reinforce the role of sociology and social sciences within the scientific community as well as in our societies. They are also an example of the kind of initiatives we can develop and that I

considered important when running for president. These were also the reasons that led me to sustain that we have to be more than bi-annual conference organizers. We must have a strategy in our mind as collective group. That is why I sustained the need to renew the presidency for a new period of two years, a change approved in the last assembly in Lisboa and to be applied from this GA on.

5) I supported also the initiative of Claire Wallace and her great job on the preparation of a Code of Ethics, which I find very important and that I really hope we will approve in this GA.

6) As I said in the beginning, the role of each member of the Executive, and all of us as a group, was crucial to the actions carried out under this presidency. But I have to underline the role played by the chairs that I did not mention above. Claire Wallace watched for our financial sanity warning us when the “dangers” were getting closer. Bill Hughes had a fundamental role chairing the Conference Programme Committee and assuring the connection with Sandro Cattacin and the LOC. Pekka Sulkunen assured our participation in external initiatives as chair of the External Relations Committee. Elina Oinas chaired the PhD Workshop Committee and organized with Pekka a super Summer School in Finland in 2010. And she also helped Ellen Kulmann chairing the PhD workshop we had here in Genève. Ellen Kulmann organized this PhD workshop wonderfully with very productive results. Marie Therese Letablier, as chair of the Publications Committee developed excellent connections with the publisher and gave especial attention to our book series edition a great achievement, as we are receiving more and more interesting proposals. We should also be especially grateful to Shalva Weil, by the fabulous work she has been doing since 2007 as Editor of our Newsletter. Like a real professional, she transformed some dull and unattractive pages into an appealing and scientifically stimulating newsletter.

It was all this collective work that made possible the amazing increase in our membership reaching now more than 1800 and the enormous amount of colleagues attending to our conference (around 3000 in Genève).

Time now to refer to some weaknesses. One of my worries from the beginning was the preservation of memory. As the rate of replacement of members of the Executive in each four years is very

high, the Executive faces sometimes problems of redundancy, deciding or discussing issues already decided and discussed or well established in the past. This fact may represent a waste of time and efforts. We will certainly have to find ways in the future to deal adequately with this problem. Let us see what ideas may come up from the first ex-Presidents meeting we are having on Saturday.

Finally, I must say that I am very glad to be able to serve ESA and to contribute with my efforts to make it a stronger association.