EDITOR'S MESSAGE

ESA is a growing organisation that encompasses a broad range of researchers coming from across Europe (and beyond). We include those at all levels of the academic career scale, from doctoral students to emeritus/emerita professors. Furthermore, we are a diverse association that brings together a wide range research interests. Our thirty-six Research Networks cover all manner of subjects from research methods to sociological theory to specific foci such as racism and antisemitism, gender studies, and ageing, to name but a few. Whilst this diversity brings with it many opportunities to collaborate and develop sociological research beyond our local or national settings, we must remember that our diversity also presents challenges. Coming from different institutional backgrounds, national contexts, et cetera; we find that, on occasion, conflicts or miscommunications may arise. This was indeed the case at our General Assembly, which took place on August 30th during our 11th Conference in Turin, Italy.

As I sat at this meeting, I witnessed many members of our association expressing their concerns over the proposed changes to our statutes. I understand that such discussion raises sensitive issues, but we must measure our words and engage in a positive discussion. As the great American statesman Abraham Lincoln once stated, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” This is true for us today. Sociology and the social sciences at large face substantial challenges as a result of the global financial crisis, which has had a considerable impact in Europe. This financial crisis resulted in substantial cuts in research funding for the social sciences as national funding bodies have tightened their belts. In addition to this, the initial outline of the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 programme did not set aside specific funding for the social sciences. In response to these challenges, European sociology must retain its critical voice. As witnessed by the hundreds of plenary, semi-plenary and paper presentations presented at our conference in Turin, sociology retains an important place in providing explanations of this crisis and models for change!

While serving as ESA’s President, Pekka Sulkunen worked tirelessly, lobbying for the inclusion of the social sciences within the Horizon 2020 programme on our behalf. His successor Carmen Leccardi has continued this work since being elected in late August. As the voice of European sociology, ESA plays an important role in the professional representation of our discipline. For their hard work on our behalf during the 2011-2013 term I would like to thank Professor Sulkunen and the members of the Executive Committee—Maria Carmela Agodi, Pertti Alasuutari, Ellen Annandale, Luis Baptista, Helena Carreiras, Vincenzo Cicchelli, Roberto Cipriani, Elena Danilova, Ricca Edmondson, Robert Fine, Tally Katz-Gerro, Ellen Kuhlmann, Luigi Pellizzoni, Suvi Ronkainen, Anne Ryen, Georg Vobruba and Frank Welz. During this period ESA grew substantially. Along with the Local Organising Committee at the University of Turin, the Executive Committee arranged ESA’s most successful conference to date. This was no small task! Dr Tiziana Nazio along with her team at the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin and Professor Frank Welz led to Conference Programme Committee deserve a special mention for their excellent work. Thank you all for the countless hours you put in to making ESA’s 11th Conference such a success!

Peter Holley
December 2013

FEATURE ARTICLE

Michel Wieviorka on racism in Europe today.

Europe remains, in the eyes of the whole world, the ‘old Continent’ where humanism, the Enlightenment, universal values and the rights of man were invented.

Read more on page 3.
Our discipline is facing a challenging time – both in terms of the ongoing economic, social and political crisis, and the need that now arises to reformulate the categories (and methods) sociology uses to analyse social processes. We can no longer rely on the categories formulated by the founding fathers of the discipline, yet at the same time not only must we take pride in that legacy, we can also find ways to deploy it strategically. Drawing on that rich conceptual heritage, we must now strive to rethink the big issues of social integration, justice and equality. And today we must do this while taking a number of new issues into account: the recession’s dramatic effects on society; the drama of immigration into Fortress Europe; growing inequalities; the future being denied to young people, above all in Southern Europe. Major ethical issues are therefore increasingly the order of the day – starting from the responsibilities of the adult generations not only towards the younger generations but also those yet to be born.

The magnitude of these processes calls for both theoretical and empirically-based reflections around a series of major issues. These include the globalisation of rights, and the key importance not only of achieving peaceful coexistence in the multiethnct world we live in, but specifically valuing the cultural differences that underpin it. More in general, following the example of Simmel, we need to foster reflections on the importance of conflict, as a force for interaction and association, as opposed to violence. Male violence against women, and femicide, are a glaring example of contemporary society’s failure to embrace the negotiation-based approach of conflict. The contribution sociological knowledge can make to such a vital issue is clearly strategic. While the issues at stake are considerable, the resources at our disposal are equally substantial. It is a question of deploying them effectively. Today’s extraordinarily rich panorama of sociological analysis, as the intense days of the Turin conference in August masterfully showed, must therefore be capitalised on to respond to these issues. Externally, by working in closer partnership with other European scientific associations and internally, by means of more effective cooperation between the RNs, the national associations, the presidency and the executive committee. The focus must be on communication, on sharing and discussing ideas and proposals, starting from the major issues that Europe specifically is now facing. In this way we can ensure that our voice, the voice of our discipline, is more strongly heard in Europe and elsewhere.

And this is no trivial matter. As is known, the new European programme for research and innovation, Horizon 2020, due to get under way at the beginning of 2014, devotes a less than ideal amount of attention to social sciences and humanities (SSH). The financial indications could not be clearer. Although Horizon 2020 has a considerably larger budget at its disposal than the Seventh Framework Programme (2007–13) – around 25 billion euro more – funding for SSH has actually diminished. This has not come about by chance, but is connected to the peripheral role that the programme attributes to SSH. Intertwined with the themes of research, innovation and development, Horizon 2020 has three so-called pillars: Excellent Science, Industrial Leadership and Societal Challenges. The latter comprises seven areas, only one of which – the sixth, entitled ‘Europe in a Changing World. Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies’ – is directly linked to SSH (the calls for proposals for 2014–15 regard, for example, areas like ‘Overcoming the Crisis’, ‘Young Generations’, ‘Europe as a Global Actor’, ‘New Forms of Innovation’, ‘Reflective Societies’). The other six areas are related to issues like health, the bioeconomy, energy, transport, the climate and security. The links between these areas and SSH, while present, are marginal. It should also be said that the area most relevant to our discipline of the seven is that with the least funding (just over a million euro). Therefore in the Societal Challenges pillar SSH paradoxically end up playing a secondary role.

This situation is the result of technocratic reasoning that has constructed a hierarchy of disciplines (and research funding), in which SSH has been given a minor role. This effectively denies the contribution that disciplines like sociology can make to guarantee processes of social inclusion, fostering forms of public debate and improving the quality of life in society. Behind the emphasis placed on an interdisciplinary approach, and the call for greater cooperation between other scientific disciplines and SSH, there is a devaluing of the specific forms of knowledge that belong to the discipline we practice. This, it can be said, is to the advantage of forms of knowledge associated with potentially greater economic returns in the here and now. This situation devalues both the critical vocation of sociology, which is fundamental above all in times of crisis, and the role that our forms of knowledge – together with those of the other human and social sciences – can play to foster the effective creation, in the medium and long term, of “Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies”.

It can be asserted that the social sciences only made a modest contribution to analysing the Great Depression of 1929. Yet nowadays the European and international sociological community is not only capable of putting high quality observations and analysis into the public domain, it is also in the position of providing public decision-makers with valuable data and interpretations in terms of overcoming the crisis. To work in this direction it is however fundamental to promote the results of our studies on a European (and transcontinental) level, activating circulation channels capable of highlighting in the public eye both the strategic importance of the questions our research raises, and the responses it identifies.

As the Chinese ideogram shows, crisis contains the dual notions of danger and opportunity. According to the Greek etymology of the term, too, a crisis is a moment of judgement, choice and decision, not just adversity. I believe that we need to capitalise on the power of knowledge to ensure that opportunity prevails over danger, and that decision-making can take the place of feelings of powerlessness.

Carmen Leccardi
December 2013
Michel Wieviorka: Racism in Europe today.

Europe remains, in the eyes of the whole world, the ‘old Continent’ where humanism, the Enlightenment, universal values and the rights of man were invented. It also remains an area where colonialism, slavery, racist ideologies, fascism and Nazism were invented or widely practiced; an area also where the two major world wars which characterized the 20th century originated. In this time of a crisis which affects Europe more than any other part of the world, is Europe not once again becoming a laboratory of evil and misfortune, instead of sending a message of confidence in progress and humanist values to the entire planet – a message indicating that it is possible to live together with our differences? An examination of the present-day question of racism sheds an interesting light here.

1. The elementary forms of racism

It is true that most of the countries in Europe are affected by the financial, economic, social and political crisis that began in 2007 or 2008, which they do not seem to be emerging from as well as others, while, at the same time, the idea of Europe has been weakened. We are far from the founding period of the European Union when it was a question of constructing an economic community that would be the best antidote to the war.

Thus Europe is the scene of racist movements that give a new impetus to a phenomenon which one might have thought was on the wane after the discovery of Nazi barbarism, and in the historical context of decolonization. But, while it is possible to assert that racism does still exist, while we consider it is correct - as we shall see - to say that it is changing, can one speak without question of a rise in the phenomenon?

Racism is not a uniform phenomenon; on the contrary, it assumes numerous and distinct forms. The specialists, for example, distinguish between prejudice and stereotypes, the major ideologies, violence, discrimination and segregation – the reader will allow me to refer here to my book, The Arena of Racism (Sage, London, 1993). The weaker each of these forms is, the less susceptible they are of integrating to form a single highly unified whole. There are different possible levels of integration of racism, from its fragmented and weak, even diffuse, modalities, to the formulas which articulate and merge them all, as was the case with Nazism or Apartheid.

In Europe today racism remains sufficiently controlled by public authorities, punishable by law and restricted in its acceptance by public opinion, to give more of an image of a fragmentation than of a phenomenon comparable to what it meant in the Nazi era or that of Apartheid. Therefore it is difficult to say that the phenomenon, as a whole, is on the rise or, on the contrary, declining: everything depends on the form in question. Prejudice may well be rising for example, while violence is on the decline.

Moreover, racism remains sufficiently discredited in Europe for it not to be permissible for those who express it directly and explicitly to do so without being subject to legal action. Therefore inconsistencies can be observed, for example, between, on one hand, the expression of prejudices and the fact of publicly stating them and, on the other, of adhering to the content of these prejudices. As a result, when it is found that racist prejudices are expressed more than previously, we do not really know whether they are more powerful and more widespread or whether it is the conditions of their public expression which have changed. Moreover, the tools for measuring racism themselves call for critical examination; the data that they transmit can tell us about the work of those whose task it is and not only about the facts themselves. If, for example, the police are encouraged to record minor acts of violence of a racist nature which they did not record in the past, the figures suddenly rise as a result of these instructions, and not necessarily because the phenomenon itself has increased.

We therefore have to be cautious whenever it is a question of referring to the rise, or the fall, of racism. Whatever the case may be, it is obvious that the phenomenon has not disappeared, that it is present in the public arena and that it constitutes a serious threat for democracy and the capacity of European societies and people to live together. This should suffice to deserve our full attention.

2. The present day mutations of racism

In the past, racism in Europe either targeted groups who had long been present on the old Continent – the Jews, the Roma Gypsies – or other peoples, groups and individuals living elsewhere, in particular in the colonies, were considered to be inferior. Racism was then physical, biological, with natural attributes such as colour of the skin or shape of the skull being considered an indication of race and that the intellectual and moral values of the individuals belonging to a presumed race could be predicted.

But, as from the 1980s, everything changed and racism in Europe developed in particular in function of the change in the societies receiving a considerable number of migrants from the South and from the East; some of these had themselves been countries of emigration only twenty years earlier – this is the case in particular for Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece.

Migrants bring religious and cultural dif-
In many cases, racism is also vigorously hostile to Islam; so much so that Muslims are subjected to a process of essentialization and racism constitutes what is sometimes referred to as Islamophobia. This poses the question of the links and of the distance between culture and religion: at the outset, religions were invented in societies where they found their space; they originated and spread in relatively determined cultures. But today the major religions are de-territorialized; they develop in cultures other than those in which they emerged and they seem to challenge these other cultures. The racism that takes the form of virulent anti-Islamism has much in common with the project of defending the integrity of a culture. But if we make a religion and those who practice it the target of a form of racism, are we still targeting a culture? Is it possible to confuse culture and religion in the analysis? Do the two registers deserve to be considered inseparable and to what extent?

So, in the 1980s and 1990s, racism seemed to become primarily differentialist or cultural. In recent years, racism has taken on a new life in an astonishing manner by ceasing to be predominantly ‘subtle’, cultural or differentialist and being re-treading the path of old colonial forms, targeting the colour of the skin, type of hair, and other physical attributes, in particular in the case of people of sub-Saharan African origin. And while the European societies were disintegrating, at the same racism itself was also being fragmented: each group, each minority, just like the dominant group, appears to be capable of including within it both victims of a racism which targets them specifically and people guilty of racism targeting either other minority groups, or else the dominant group. Some Blacks admit to hating Asians, some Jews hate Muslims and Arabs, etc. and among some of these groups, some people are liable in some cases to express an ‘anti-Whites’ racism – a theme which emerged recently particularly in circles politically oriented very much to the right.

Finally, racism in Europe finds in the national-populist parties, the extension which enables it to rise to the political level, even to the level of head of State, since it does happen that parties of this type participate in a coalition exercising power. This phenomenon is a cause for concern because these parties— which, we should stress, are usually anti-Europe—are thriving and not only in places where the economic crisis is at its worst. If racism continues to haunt Europe, it is not only for economic and social reasons; it is also because it is battling its way through cultural change and against a background of exhaustion of the classical systems of political representation.

3. Racism and the Internet

We are now in a new cultural era, characterized by the rise of individualism which itself sustains that of collective identities, since increasingly, individuals choose to adhere to, or to abandon, the identities which attract them, or which no longer suit them. Present-day individualism, for its part, is sustained by global perceptions and finds original modes of expression in what the Internet provides in the way of new technologies of information and communication.

These have often been praised for the favourable conditions which they provide for mobilizations which rise up against a dictatorship or a corrupt power, but the counterpart of this positive contribution is that the same technologies can also facilitate the expansion of evil and in particular of racism. Between purely private space and the classical public arena, they provide an intermediary area which enables information to be circulated, positions adopted, feelings also, on an unprecedented scale without the enforcement of any control, in particular the legal controls which ensure respect for the classical public space especially the media.

For the new generations, who were born in the digital era, this intermediary zone is an area of freedom where there should not really be any restriction on personal expression. For the older generations, this zone means the opportunity to appear, to enter a world where it is possible to discuss, to communicate and to express ideas, some of which may be fuelled by hatred and resentment. Consequently, racist prejudices circulate at top speed and without borders; what was contained, driven back into the private sphere, into interpersonal conversations benefits now from increased opportunities for circulation.
4. The crisis of democracy

If racism is prevalent and is expressed today, it is also because of the limits or the shortcomings of political systems and even more broadly, of democracy. Throughout Europe, representative democracy is in difficulty, and countless opinion polls reveal the increasing rejection of traditional political forces. In some cases, like in Spain, both the left as well as the classical right have failed; there is no alternative. In others, it is less clear. But in all instances, officials and political parties, even if they are not accused of corruption, are widely perceived as powerless or incapable of confronting the major, present-day challenges, beginning with the economic and social crisis, to the extent that it becomes tempting to adopt the hypothesis of the entry into post-democracy described for example by Colin Crouch (Post-Democracy, Polity Press, London, 2004).

Sometimes it is suggested that the response to the crisis in political representation is the development of various forms of participative or deliberative democracy which could if not take its place, at least complement it. But, the endeavours to consider the difficulties of democracy and to relaunch it are increasingly being sharply confronted with the idea that on the contrary the crisis must be deepened, as if this was a salutary approach: there must be a break with the systems, the parties and the officials who are established there. This idea can lead to giving politics in general a wide berth. It also frequently goes along with appeals for a closed society and an ethnically pure nation; in these instances it may possibly be reflected and shaped politically by national-populist type forces.

The greater the apparent legitimacy of these national-populist forces—which, in some instances, are respectful of the democratic process—the more their rise opens up a new arena for racism, not only within their own organizations and amongst those who vote for them but also well beyond, in society as a whole: if a leader or a populist party can participate in democratic discussion, express themselves in the media, even be under pressure to do so, then the greater the legitimacy accruing to the ideas they express, including when they are racist. Thus it is not paradoxical if a national-populist party, in order to achieve its ends, moderates its discourse in public, presents itself as being rid of any form, at least explicit, of racism and, at the same time, contributes to opening up the general arena of racism in society as a whole.

In Europe, not everything is racism, hatred, appeals for a closed society and a homogeneous nation by any means, and if, in the absence of a rigorous proof, it is dangerous to describe these tendencies as being definitively on the rise, it is at least clear that they are very real and present. Can we specify what the role of researchers in the humanities and social sciences might be here?

Too often, when they participate on this issue in public discussion, it is as citizens, perhaps indignant, but in any event without highlighting any particular competence in the matter, any ability to use arguments based on scientific knowledge. This is not a reply to the question. In my opinion, the contribution of the humanities and social sciences should be located at the intersection of the production of knowledge and its distribution. The participation of researchers in public discussion becomes clearer when it is based, not on an overall legitimacy, in particular as academics, but on the fact that it is based on sound knowledge. Should it not be the role of some of us to study these phenomena, to inform people as to their importance and to provide the scientific elements for general discussion and consideration which would enable them to be effectively tackled?

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Open Access and the new enclosure movement

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INTRODUCTION

The language of openness is powerful and persuasive. Applied to the practices of government, it purports to be about transparency and holding politicians to account. Applied to public services, it purports to be about the evaluation of performance to facilitate decision-making by their users. Applied to publicly funded research in universities, it purports to be about providing access to research that otherwise exists behind the paywalls of high subscription cost journals. Applied to university teaching, it purports to make high quality education available outside the limited access of elite institutions that produce it. For many commentators, then, open access to data and academic publications will bring clear public benefits, facilitating better public debate and allowing different kinds of elites to be held to account, whether they be political elites, policy makers or other kinds of experts. And aren’t most academics interested in the widest dissemination of their work? What is there to contest? The benefits of open access have been set out in detail in an OECD Report, Giving Knowledge for Free: the emergence of open educational resources (2007). However, let us not forget that the push to open access in the UK (and elsewhere) occurs in the context of dramatic reforms to universities that stress that higher education (in England) should not be seen as a public benefit, but a private investment in human capital for which the beneficiary should pay (and should pay above its costs once fees are allowed to rise above the current fee cap).

OPEN ACCESS AND ENCLOSURE

Open access occurs in a context of enclosure. Enclosure involves a private property model where knowledge produced under patent, or subject to commercial exploitation, is to be exempt from the requirement of being open, regardless of the public benefit. This is evident in the way in which, for example, the European Medicines Agency is currently being lobbied by big pharmaceutical companies to prevent the requirement to disclose the results of clinical trials. But what is at issue is not just the differential treatment afforded commercial interests against those involved in the public sector. It is also the way in which open access in the latter is made to serve commercialisation in areas of supposed public benefit. These developments are now taking place at increasing pace as part of government initiatives to free up restrictions to the knowledge economy and facilitate global competitiveness. It seems that a paywall is to be removed, at the same time as new paywalls are under construction.

Of course, according to the tenets of neo-liberal public policy, the extension of markets is in the public interest and the liberal constitution, as John Tomasi (2012) indicates (approvingly), is properly considered as a constitution of private property. This establishes enclosure as a necessary and fundamental part of the dynamic of open access. Indeed, the UK Minister for Universities and Science seeks a more efficient and diverse system in which for-profit providers will play a larger part, and even envisages a change in the corporate form of the university to facilitate greater engagement with private equity investors.

According to the recent White Paper on open data (2012), marketization is to be applied to mechanisms to ensure good governance. In other words, open access to public data is promoted at the same time as public data is privatised. On the one hand, the gathering of data by government will be reduced as a consequence of cuts, including, for example, significant cuts to the data gathering by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). At the same time, there is the possibility that ONS itself will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy). This is prefigured in other actions by the Cabinet Office, including the ‘mutualisation’ of the Behavioural Change Unit. The term ‘mutualisation’ is something of a misnomer since it will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy). This is prefigured in other actions by the Cabinet Office, including the ‘mutualisation’ of the Behavioural Change Unit. The term ‘mutualisation’ is something of a misnomer since it will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy). This is prefigured in other actions by the Cabinet Office, including the ‘mutualisation’ of the Behavioural Change Unit. The term ‘mutualisation’ is something of a misnomer since it will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy). This is prefigured in other actions by the Cabinet Office, including the ‘mutualisation’ of the Behavioural Change Unit. The term ‘mutualisation’ is something of a misnomer since it will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy). This is prefigured in other actions by the Cabinet Office, including the ‘mutualisation’ of the Behavioural Change Unit. The term ‘mutualisation’ is something of a misnomer since it will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy). This is prefigured in other actions by the Cabinet Office, including the ‘mutualisation’ of the Behavioural Change Unit. The term ‘mutualisation’ is something of a misnomer since it will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy). This is prefigured in other actions by the Cabinet Office, including the ‘mutualisation’ of the Behavioural Change Unit. The term ‘mutualisation’ is something of a misnomer since it will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy). This is prefigured in other actions by the Cabinet Office, including the ‘mutualisation’ of the Behavioural Change Unit. The term ‘mutualisation’ is something of a misnomer since it will be privatised and that the Census will be replaced by linked administrative data (raising significant issues of privacy).
publicly funded research and advanced the idea that, where there was a private beneficiary, the beneficiary should pay. Now it seems that there should be no research undertaken without a beneficiary, but that beneficiary does not pay. Indeed, RCUK seeks no return on patents derived from the research it funds. These are allowed to accrue income for individual researchers and their ‘employers’ with no return to the public that funds the research.

In fact, open data encourages the commercialisation of ‘big data’ in a manner analogous to that outlined in pharmaceutical research by Philip Mirowski (2011). The facilitation of private patents drawn on federally funded research, following the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act in the USA, did not give rise to an increase in patents drawn on federally funded research, following the 1980 data’ in a manner analogous to that outlined in pharmaceutical research.

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In the UK, the Browne Review (2010) and the subsequent White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System, (2011) is now a familiar story. Direct public funding of arts, humanities and social science undergraduate degrees was removed, to be replaced by student fees backed by a publicly supported system of loans. In part, this reflected a neo-liberal agenda, where an inclusive public interest in higher education is denied. The argument is that education should be seen as a private investment in human capital to be paid for by the graduate beneficiary.

However, the removal of direct public funding for non-STEM (non-Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects was also designed to create a level-playing field for the access of for-profit providers to students (and the associated system of loan support for fees). The fully marketised system recommended by Browne depended in part on there being no cap on fees with pressure thereby created for fees to spread and for-profits to enter by providing low cost education. While the spread of fees has not occurred (because of a temporary cap imposed by Liberal Democrat members of the coalition), the government remains committed to low cost education by for-profit providers. The playing field is not so much levelled as tilted in favour of for-profits, since they can enter relieved of university functions other than those of teaching at the lowest cost.

The logic for this is provided by Sir Michael Barber, who had previously been head of McKinsey’s Global Education Practice and after membership of the Browne Review has taken up a post as Chief Education Adviser at Pearson. His report, written together with Katelyn Donnelly and Saad Rizvi (2013) and published under the auspices of Think Tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), sets out the “disruption” and “unbundling” of the functions of universities as a consequence of the globalisation of higher education and new technologies for the delivery of content. This report also argues for the revolutionary role of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS) and other online curriculum resources in delivering content that can be unbundled from tutorial support and assessment, all of which can be provided separately – for example, by for-profit providers.

THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

But what of the humanities and social sciences? Surely, here the situation is different? First, let it be noted that the very commercialisation of the university itself will have the consequence of dividing the higher education system between a small number of elite universities and others subject to the pressures from for-profit providers. This will include the ‘unbundling’ of their functions (also involving the separation of research from teaching), as described by Sir Michael Barber, Chief Education Advisor of Pearson (and former member of the Browne Review), in a recent publication for IPPR. In this context, open access provided by ‘elite’ universities is the means of undermining the conditions at other institutions and providing a tiered educational system that reinforces social selection to elite positions. This is the context in which Mike Boxall of PA Consulting Group speaks of a sector divided among ‘oligarchs, innovators and zombies’.

Equally significant, is that the argument for unbundling (some) universities is the claim that research is increasingly taking place outside universities. In the case of the social sciences, this is research undertaken by ‘think tanks’ and commercial organisations. It is here that access to ‘big data’ provides commercial opportunities. Open access is an opportunity to amalgamate data from different sources, develop techniques of analysis under patent, and re-present data, and the means of checking any analysis using it, behind a new paywall. Significantly, the recent ESRC call for a What Works Partnership in Crime Re-

production specifies that the products of the research need not be under CC BY, but under IPR arrangements. This is the context in which it is argued that public data like the census can be given up and replaced by data sourced from administrative functions and commercial data, and that the Cabinet Office Behavioural Change Unit can be ‘mutualised’. In effect, the function of holding government to account is also commercialised, where the role of commercial interests in the realisation of policies should itself be a matter of public concern.

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At the same time, open access and MOOCs are described as meeting the social objectives of providing access to education for poor people or remote populations in countries with less developed educational infrastructure. In practice, though, the ‘unbundling’ of activities is advocated in order better to subject them to marketisation and to make publicly provided services available to for-profit providers. One aspect of the unbundling of university activities that Sir Michael and his colleagues recommend, alongside the separation of lecture content from tutorial support and curriculum from those who teach it, is the separation of teaching and research. The latter they suggest should be concentrated on a few elite universities, who might provide a public service by supplying their curriculum in the form of MOOCs, albeit as a potential source of profit, too.

In the emerging new philosophy of MOOCs the status of the elite universities providing them is maintained, together with the high fees that they can charge for a non-MOOC education, primarily because what they are selling is their brand. In this way, higher education as a positional good in a highly inegalitarian neo-liberal knowledge economy is reinforced, in contrast to previous education policies that sought to mitigate positional effects.

What I have described are tendencies within the emerging eco-system of open resources and open access. There are countervailing tendencies to the enclosure of the commons, but they must be fought for. What is dispiriting is that the UK used to have a public university providing mass, open online-equivalent courses, namely the Open University, which cooperated with the BBC in the provision of course material that could be recorded and viewed or listened to independently of broadcast time. It also offered tutorial support through its regional centres, which are now being reduced.

In the incomplete market for higher education that has emerged in England after the White Paper, much has been made of the fact that applications for undergraduate degrees seem to be unaffected by the rise in student fees. At least part of the explanation for this is high youth unemployment, which means that the alternative to higher education is all too likely to be unemployment. In fact, the true impact of fees is evident in the collapse by 40% in applications for part-time study. Significantly, a recent report by the Commission on the Future for Higher Education (2013), also for IPPR, has argued that there should be funding to provide £5000 fee support for part-time students, but that they should not have access to loans for living costs. This proposal seems designed to facilitate the expansion of for-profit higher education, especially within the Further Education sector. Unsurprisingly, Pearson waits in the wings, as a dominant player in Further Education through its curriculum and assessment arm, Pearson Edexcel.

CONCLUSION: MARKETS VERSUS DIÁLOGUE

What I have described are tendencies within the emerging eco-system of open resources and open access. There are countervailing tendencies to the enclosure of the commons, but they must be fought for. What is dispiriting is that the UK used to have a public university providing mass, open online-equivalent courses, namely the Open University, which cooperated with the BBC in the provision of course material that could be recorded and viewed or listened to independently of broadcast time. It also offered tutorial support through its regional centres, which are now being reduced.

It is not new technology that is disrupting this model, but public policy. Equally, it is not new technology that is disrupting a system of education that had the aspiration to provide for all young people, rather than create a stratified education system for a highly stratified society. Once again, it is public policy. This public policy goes under the rubric of transparency and openness, but what it seeks is to open all activities to the market and reduce public accountability of its operation. The market is declared to embody the public interest, but as Britain has become one of the most unequal societies in the world in the name of a neo-liberal knowledge economy, it can hardly be claimed as an inclusive public interest.

The broader matter at issue here is two competing philosophies of openness. One operates under a neo-liberal theory of knowledge, where the market serves to maximise the production and distribution of knowledge. The other is where the market is part of the problem and public institutions like universities serve democracy by facilitating debate and dialogue. Under the first, the market is the ‘automatic’ guarantor of the public interest and any negative consequences are simply ascribed to the failure properly to establish effective markets. The lasting paradox is that the debate over open access celebrates its contribution to dialogue while ignoring the underlying processes by which the possibility of genuine dialogue over our future is being undermined.
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John Holmwood’s blogs include:


On open access and MOOCs: http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/makingsciencepublic/2013/02/27/open-access-and-moocs-follow-the-money/.


Endnotes:
1. The way in which devolved government operate sin the UK is that higher education is a matter of separate jurisdictions in England, Wales and Scotland, such that UK government policy only directly applies to England except in matters of Research Council policy.


Meet ESA’s New Executive Committee

At the 11th Conference of the European Sociological Association (ESA) that took place in Turin, Italy in August 2013, seventeen individuals representing universities from across Europe were elected to serve for two years on ESA’s Executive Committee (2011-2013). There are some old faces that have served as members of past executives, but approximately half are newcomers, elected for the first time. Whilst the names of those serving appear on the association’s website, ESA members rarely get to know the sociologists who work tirelessly to ensure European Sociology maintain its voice and its relevance amongst the cacophony of voices that seek to gain influence in a world in which the production of knowledge often is considered secondary to the market-driven forces steering national and European research programmes. In keeping with past issues of *European Sociologist*, the following article introduces the members of ESA’s 2013-2015 Executive Committee by asking them five brief questions (seen opposite).

Their responses are listed in alphabetical order.

Why did you decide to become a sociologist?

Which of your professional activities (publications, research projects, teaching, etc.) are you proudest of? Why?

If you were deserted on a desert island and could only take two books with you (one academic text and one novel), what would these be?

In which area(s) of sociology are you most interested? Why?

Which forms of knowledge or special skills can sociologists offer contemporary society?
When at school I was very fond of philosophy and especially the philosophy of science. I was uncertain the direction my studies should take and I had to choose between specializing in physics and philosophy at the first stage of my university career. I thought that both of these disciplines were privileged tools to understand our contemporary world and a precondition to make it become a better one. When it was time to take my decision regarding my field of study at university, I found, on my father’s desk, a booklet about a degree in Political Science. Looking into it I discovered that the Sociology syllabus was full of texts by Popper, Frege, Wittgenstein and other philosophers of science I loved so much. It was the 1975 and all students, in those days, were politically committed and dreamed of changing social institutions and the existing social order. So was I, and engaging myself in such a degree in Political Science seemed an unexpected yet promising way to make both things possible at one time: to follow my intellectual preferences and to satisfy my social and political commitment. That was my first step towards becoming a sociologist.

Within sociology, my favourite areas of study are science and technology studies, welfare regimes, and gender studies. I have always been cultivating interests also in general sociological theory and methodology. My preferences are, on the one hand, a result of what my original interests were when I began to study and conduct sociological research (STS, in particular as a perspective to study society in general, from the upcoming of finance as a regulating institution to globalization as well) and, on the other, of my sociological studies, as they developed along the way. I think the European social model and its welfare regimes have been a great social innovation and are – nowadays – seriously at risk. The process through which this model is being attacked – economically, politically and culturally – deserves to be studied, paying great attention in order to make visible possibly that such welfare regimes might be rescued. Coming to women and gender studies, they are a transversal, illuminating, the relatively undervalued perspective through which society can be understood. Such perspectives, in particular, possess implications for and new understandings of the transformation of the welfare state, and of science and technology too.

I am proud of myself when I’m doing my best work, be it while teaching, doing research, or writing and publishing. I have always enjoyed doing research in methodology and general theory, but I am more proud of having succeeded in transforming some of my sociological research into a collective endeavour. This has happened with most of my research projects on welfare, in which I succeeded in pulling together other colleagues in a collective effort within an original and, I think, illuminating perspective. I am also proud of my work in the sociology of science, a field that was not so much cultivated in Italy when I started to work in it, and where with a few pioneering colleagues, we opened the way for a new generation of researchers who have established what is now a very lively research field and a new scientific association, STS- Italia. Finally, I am very proud and grateful for having been elected to the Executive Committee of ESA, not only with the votes of many individual Italian and not-Italian colleagues, but also with the declared support of RN 33, the Women and gender studies network. This was an honour and a responsibility too.

Maria Carmela Agodi
Professor
University “Federico II”, Naples, Italy
The contribution of sociological knowledge to contemporary society is as important as much as it is currently of unacknowledged value. We need much a more sociological understanding to be spread in the collective cultural frameworks people live in: this is the only key towards a more reflexive democracy through a more reflexive understanding of social institutions and regulating systems. Sociology can help understand the social world is not regulated by immutable rules because it is a human endeavour, whose rules are changing while institutions change; that the rules of the markets are the results of the different markets as they have been historically established and that they could be transformed if differently regulated; that which appears new (so called new technologies, for example) may function according to well-known and not so new rules, while what appears old (the family, for example) may function according to unexpectedly changing regulating mechanisms.

Sociological competence and sociological skills – the capability to find and give meaning to data relating to social phenomena; the sociological imagination necessary to link biographical destinies to structural and historical understandings – should be a necessary part of the education of people, especially those with public influence and collective responsibilities.

I guess I never really decided, I was accepted to study sociology as my major, but my original aim was to become a journalist. When I graduated as MA, I was offered research funding and stayed on.

Cultural sociology: media studies; global and transnational studies; social theory, and methodology of social research. My areas of interest have evolved over the decades I have spent as a sociologist, so it is hard to say why. I have always some things I am interested in.

I guess I am proudest of two of my textbooks – *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies and Social Theory and Human Reality* – and our research team TCuPS – Tampere Research Group for Cultural and Political Sociology. Those two books have stood the test of time, and our research team has created a new take on how to understand and research power and governance on a global scale.

Sociology advances rational discussion on society and self-reflectivity on politics and governance. In that sense it is a healthy antidote to fashionable ideas that are easily pushed through without careful thought and questioning.

**Pertti Alasuutari**

*Professor*
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Finland

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Which forms of knowledge or special skills can sociologists offer contemporary society?

Why did you decide to become a sociologist?

In which area(s) of sociology are you most interested? Why?

Which of your professional activities (publications, research projects, teaching, etc.) are you proudest of? Why?

Which forms of knowledge or special skills can sociologists offer contemporary society?
The first books that came to mind were Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* and Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. They both made a big impression on me when I first read them. Interestingly they both have to do with religion although it is not one of my areas of interest. But maybe deserted on a small island I would appreciate that aspect of the human experience as well.

I studied sociology from the age of 14 in school. Looking back it seems I have always in some shape or form been a sociologist at heart. I was attracted to sociology for the conceptual and methodological tools it provides us with to study of inequality and social justice, something that has remained at the top of my own research agenda. The sociology of health and healthcare as a subfield was an early attraction to me, and remains so, because of its practical facility to diagnose the upstream causes of what often appear to be individual ills.

The sociology of health and illness, the sociology of gender, social theory (especially feminist theory), sociology of organisations and professions. These areas come together in my interest in ‘gender and health’. I am fascinated by the insight that issues of health can provide into social relations of gender and, in turn, by how social relations of gender structure how we think (as members of society and as sociologists) about health and illness.

I am proud of the range of collaborative projects and writing partnerships that I have had the privilege to be involved in and the many PhD students I have been fortunate to supervise.

Sociology as a discipline provides us with the conceptual tools to diagnose and analyse the effects of increasing global complexity and what this means for social groups set apart by unequal access to the resources that are necessary for a good life. For example, the sociology of health draws attention to the profound inequalities in health and longevity that arise not only from economic inequality but also from new ways of governing bodies, the extraction of biovalue from disadvantaged bodies, and the securitization of health.

I’d have to choose *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy and *Life in the Sickroom* by Martineau.
When I was an adolescent I was extremely interested in cultural diversity, language and history. I remember I was deeply moved by Levi Strauss's book Race and History and I decide to move from Italy, where I was born, to Paris. Other great thinkers of that period inspired me, such as Fernand Braudel, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Jean-Pierre Vernant. I did not decide to become a sociologist, but it was quite natural to me to embrace a science-based understanding of societies.

After several years of working on comparison of youth conditions in Europe, I am currently involved in enhancing post-national perspectives. The question I address in my recent books is both general and specific. It is general because it inevitably covers a number of commonalities that are shared by authors who are actively engaged in promoting cosmopolitanism. It is specific because I am concerned with the operationalization of the cosmopolitan perspective. Cosmopolitanism is a well-established and controversial theme, it invites more controversy than consensus. In my view it is worthwhile to consider in which way and to what extent cosmopolitanism could become a valuable perspective in social sciences. I would like to show there is some credence to the view that the cosmopolitan sociology is a heuristic way to understand how human communities, individuals, and institutions relate to globality and its outcomes.

I am proud of my new book series (Brill Publishing, Leyden and Boston): "Youth in a Globalizing World". The main reason for launching a new book series focused on adolescence and youth from an international perspective is due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the emergence of transnational shared practices, values, norms, behaviours, cultures and patterns among young people all over the globe. The series aims at being a forum for discussion and exchanges, a space for intellectual creativity on all questions relating to youth in a globalising world.

In my view, sociology must cooperate more closely with other Human Sciences in order to better understand the great transformations we are witnessing. We live in a world of "overlapping communities of fate" where the trajectories of all countries are deeply enmeshed with each other (Held). In our globalised world, the interaction between States and raises the question of how issues that go well beyond national borders can be regulated. What kind of answers a collective identity is able to give to the major challenges of globalisation? How each civilisation, nation or other human groups contribute to build a common world? As we live in a world connected and plural, formulating a cosmopolitan approach lays to adopt a universalistic outlook and to respect cultural differences. This is, to me, the crucial form of sociological knowledge sociology must offer to our societies.

I definitely chose Dante’s Divine Comedy. This poem has been a source of inspiration for countless artists for almost seven centuries and always enthralls me. As an academic text, nothing could top Tocqueville’s Democracy in America.
My early education was founded upon two strategically decisive bases: Socialism, at political level (thanks to the influence of an uncle of mine who was a socialist of the old early twentieth-century type) and Catholicism (which saw me actively involved from an early age in pastoral work of an educational nature, including sport). Both domains made me particularly open-minded towards and interested in social issues, community life and respect for people. At university (where I enrolled in the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy) I discovered Sociology, thanks to the fascinating and persuasive teaching of Professor Franco Ferrarotti. I soon had no doubts: I would devote myself to that field of study.

My degree thesis focused on the “religious” sociology of Italia. From then on, I began investigating the phenomenon of religion but I also realized that in order to find an adequate way of interpreting findings quantitative data alone were not sufficient and so I set out to develop a qualitative methodology (also with the help of computers) as well as a multi-method approach, believing that neither perspective (quantitative nor qualitative) could, on its own, provide an acceptable reading mode for the sociology of religion. I also went deeply into the history of religion and the relative documentation, working in a number of important archives (for example the Secret Vatican Archives and several Mexican archives, in particular those of Mexico City, Morelia and Uruapan). I also developed a growing interest in visual sociology as an investigational instrument to apply in this field of study.

As one of my principal aims was that of putting the best work carried out in the ambit of the sociology of religion on the international map, I wrote the *Manuale di sociologia della religione* (Manual of the sociology of religion) and more recently the *Nuovo manuale di sociologia della religione* (New manual of the sociology of religion) both in Italian and published by Borla, Rome. I also published translations of it in English (by Aldine de Gruyter, New York), in Spanish (now available in a new, improved edition, by Siglo XXI di Buenos Aires), Portuguese (by Paulus, Sao Paulo do Brasil), French (L’Harmattan, Paris) and Chinese (to date the only text of its kind in that language, by the Renmin University Press, Beijing). Another project carried out is a comparative international study involving three small “mountain communities” respectively in Italy (Orune, in Sardinia), Greece (Episkepsi, on the island of Corfú) and Mexico (Nahuatzen, in the State of Michoacán) which investigated the relations between community and solidarity. As far as productions of visual sociology are concerned I wish to mention, among others, the research films Rossocontinuo concerning the Red Christ of Cerignola, in the province of Foggia (Italy), and Las fiestas de san Luis, about the celebration of the patron saint of Nahuatzen in Mexico. Teaching is also a strong passion of mine, and my principal didactic aim is to make the theories and principle tools of sociology clear and intelligible.
Sociological knowledge cannot be, nor should it be, generic. Statements not based on empirical research and documentary evidence should not be made. Sociologists become operative actors in and assets to society if their work is as correct as possible from a scientific point of view (methodology, sampling, research tools etc.) and as free from prejudice and value judgements as can be. The best service sociologists can provide society with is their competence, based on procedural rigor, accuracy of exposition and interpretation, on the assumption that their readings of society will always be partial, provisional, and susceptible to further investigation and revision.

I’d have to choose Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* and Hugo’s *Les Misérables*.

I’m not sure that I did decide to become a sociologist. I think I found myself studying sociology because I wanted to add to the understanding of human affairs I had gained studying philosophy.

I’m most interested in the ways human interaction, convention and tradition influence how people think about the world and each other. If we take sociology seriously, it is apparent that ordinary thinking can seldom be an exclusively ‘cognitive’ affair, but must be deeply embedded in human action; yet this does not mean we can do without standards for evaluating it that are reasonable and just. Hence I am interested in concepts of wisdom, which have traditionally been a focus for how people can take uncertainty and responsiveness to other people into account without abandoning significant values.

I think all professional activities should run into each other – teaching is a wonderful experience if it is clearly carried out together with students, so that you are all researching together. Without constant writing, it’s impossible to clarify key ideas, but it’s hard to feel proud of what you’ve written: it’s all a work in progress.

Without a sociological understanding of itself, a society will tend to absolutise its own actions and attitudes, which is likely to be disastrous.

I’d take Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*, to study how be generous and practise friendship, in the hope of being rescued; I’d also take *Catch-22*, because it bears re-reading so many times – and could supply the necessary scepticism about human society to console me in case I wasn’t!

**Ricca Edmondson**

*Professor*

School of Political Science and Sociology, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland
One negative reason for becoming a sociologist was that in my undergraduate studies I found philosophy too abstract, politics too conservative and economics too dry. More positively I found in Sociology a way of understanding that even the most personal aspects of the world have social origins and do not have to be the way they are.

My current interest lies in cosmopolitan theory because it brings out the normative and cognitive universalism latent within classical sociology, in the sociology of rights because it addresses the social forms of subjectivity in the modern world, and the sociology of anti-Semitism because it brings us back to one of the driving forces of the sociological imagination – a universalistic explanation of capitalism that is not reliant on essentialist typifications.

I am now Emeritus. While I continue to supervise PhD students, engage in research and present my research results in conferences, I no longer do the day-job of teaching. Under these changed circumstances I am proudest now of my publications – both my own and those I edit or co-edit of others. I also remain very proud of the achievements of the former PhD students I supervised.

Most of all I think Sociology can enable us to see the world from the point of view of other people and to escape from the excesses of our own subjectivity. It shows us that our interdependence with others and our freedom as individuals are not opposites but are reliant upon one other. In a world of increasingly marked by a cruel economics and a top down legality, Sociology reveals something of the determinate social relations that are hidden by both these aspects of capitalist society.

I think my academic book would be a translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, since on the one hand he never ceases to enrich the sociological imagination and on the other he presents us with a challenge of understanding that will fruitfully pass the time. My novel would have to be long, rich and reflective. There are plenty of contenders. I guess George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* would be up there – especially as I am yet to finish it! I assume I shall be afforded the complete works of Shakespeare.
I started my undergraduate studies in sociology and political science in order to gain general education. During my first year, I attended two excellent courses on culture and on stratification, which taught me the language of sociology. I wanted to learn more and more ever since.

I am most interested in the intersection of culture and inequality. It seems to me that these are the two big concepts in sociology, which in fact capture everything else and drive social life. This interest has motivated me to study issues such as consumption, cultural inequality, cultural policy, and environmental habitus.

I am very happy when I see my work discussed in other people’s research, that someone took an interest in my work and found it useful.

Critical reflection alongside empathy.

I wanted to be philosopher and understand “who am I”. However I could not study philosophy after secondary school, so I have chosen sociology as a closest major to philosophy.

Sociology of interaction. The reason is: I can understand more about how the social worlds emerge, intersect, divide, fight, change and disappear and how the identity of an individual in these situations changes. This allows me to be more practical in my occupation as an active sociologist.

I am proudest of my research project on the the social world of yoga practice.


Sociology can contribute only by practical applications; otherwise it could disappear as astrology. Sociology pretends to give patterns of understanding of society and/or “gives” predictions without practical verifications of them. These tricks are already demystified and criticized. It is time for action. Sociology should diagnose, predict the possible trends of developing of phenomena, and give the models for practical applications in action.

I’d have to choose Anselm L. Strauss’ Mirrors and Masks. The search for identity and anything by Bhagavad Gita.
It was 1971-72 and I was 16 at the time. A dictatorial regime ruled the country. I thought that it was disastrous and was curious to understand why it came into existed and how it may cease. I sensed that the regime was not solely related to the word of politics but had an important social dimension too, as well as impact, so I turned to what I thought would provide the answer, sociology! Thereafter, I was lured to sociology by three professors of mine that variably impressed me and were significant others, namely Caliope Spinelli, Dimitris Tsaoussis and Dimitris Carmokolias. The latter in particular, a Columbia educated sociologist that has now passed, was instrumental in bringing me in touch with several aspects of contemporary sociology, and encouraging me too to pursue my nascent research interests.

Social structures, sociology of work, the professions and middle strata, and economic sociology. Even if we are not just bearers of structures in the sense of L. Althusser, social structures largely circumscribe our range of possibilities; how they cannot interest me! As for the other areas of sociology mentioned, they are too important to be left solely to economists, policy specialists and politicians, jurists, journalists or others that have no specialist conception of the centrality, influence and impact of social relations in them.

A series of papers I have authored over the last three or so years in which I explore various aspects of the still unfolding “crisis” that Greece is facing. Why? Because it is topical and important to decipher the crisis to be able to move beyond it. Then, my work on contemporary artisans, which has been partly published in Towards a Sociology of Artisans (Ashgate 2001), for dissecting the stratum and identifying a social mechanism for its survival and recreation.

Sociology can assist in generating knowledge to help our understanding of society’s various aspects; it can expand our grasp of complex social phenomena. Thus, it may assist the civilizing process and citizens’ empowerment.

If I’ll find myself in a deserted island, I will not be particularly bothered to read books. Instead I suppose that I would be spending all my energy trying to find a way to rejoin society. If I voluntarily go to an isolated place to become a hermit, I will have my own good personal reasons and, again, reading a book will not be a priority. Nonetheless, Merton’s Serendipity would be a good read and so would social history books such as those by Carlo Ginsburg.
The reason why is closely linked to when I took this decision, namely at the end of the 1960s. The social climate of that period, as is well known, was extraordinarily tumultuous. The widespread sensation, especially among youngsters, was that the world was about to change radically. The power to change was in our hands, and depended above all on our ability to acknowledge that we all shared the same needs and desires and to ensure that these were acknowledged collectively. Thanks to the up and coming generations the future was going to be better than the present. In turn the present was already far removed from the past that we believed our parents and teachers belonged to. It was in this period of great cultural ferment, and widespread social hope, that I decided to study sociology. To put an end to family authoritarianism, the hierarchical framework of the institutions, and social inequalities, including on an international scale, we had to understand how social power was structured, how the institutions worked, how social conflicts arose... But I would be lying if I said that in that period I wanted to “become a sociologist”. I strongly desired to study sociology – but the two did not automatically overlap in that period.

My area of study and research is the sociology of culture. Linked to that, women’s and gender studies, youth studies and time. All these fields revolve around studying the interactions between symbolic orders, processes of constructing meaning and relationships of dominance. As Bourdieu highlighted, symbolic orders should also be analysed in conjunction with the dynamics of economic and political power. From this angle I believe that individual and collective expressions of subjectivity are of great significance. In a context of accelerated social change like the present, the dynamics of the relationship between social identities, subjectivity and institutional processes appear to be of great significance to sociology as a whole. From this point of view the women’s and youth movements in the second half of the twentieth century represent a unique opportunity for sociological analysis.

Without a doubt the research and publications that focus on analysing temporal processes in the social world. Since I began exploring time from a sociological perspective, some decades ago – and Elias played a particularly important role in this – and working on an empirical level with the tools of temporal analysis, I have seen new horizons open up. The study of time from a social perspective means we are not obliged to separate the individual, social and natural levels. For sociology in particular, a temporal approach means we can hold together various levels of analysis: economic, cultural and political, as well as biography and history. As I have attempted to show in my publications, women’s and youth studies also benefit greatly from this approach. In the country where I live and work, Italy, this analytical angle (thanks above all to the pioneering work of Alessandro Cavalli) is attracting increasing interest. My experience as editor of the journal Time & Society – and my relationship with Barbara Adam in particular - have confirmed its strategic importance.
The more the information society takes hold, the more new types of common sense, and new stereotypes and prejudices – a process only apparently paradoxical – tend to strengthen. On one hand they appear to offer something to cling to, as our certainties slip away, while on the other they guarantee effective forms of social control. The marginalisation of entire groups – migrants being a case in point – is also based on this. Sociological knowledge, starting from the problematization of common sense, appears to me to be the most fitting antidote to these practices, enabling us to experience the changes with a critical eye. More in general, sociology seems to be the most qualified discipline to identify, analyse and combat the dynamics of increasing social inequality.

*The Sociology of Georg Simmel* by Kurt Wolff and Herta Müller's *The Hunger Angel*.

It was accidental. My undergraduate degree was political science. Years later after a career change in my late thirties doing an ethnographic PhD on an area of interest I found I was drawing on sociological theories as a way of making sense of my findings and I have continued since then.

I am interested in professionals and organisations in the public sector and health in particular. After leaving university I joined the UK National Health Service, which explains my initial interest in this area.

I think that pride is overrated! I have had a lot of luck in my life including being able to learn from good friends, colleagues and students. I don’t think about pride in my ‘achievements’ so much as gratitude.

I will avoid ‘motherhood and apple pie’ statements about the potential power of sociology, especially when most ESA members can articulate the contribution more clearly than I can. A lot of my research has been concerned with bringing a sociological lens to policy problems and ‘solutions’, particularly in the public sphere. The contribution of sociology in those contexts is to illustrate the complexity of the phenomena being studied and in some cases to help inform policy in a way which takes account of such complexity.

I think we have a big task in terms of dialogue with stakeholders such as funding bodies and the public. There are many strands to this task but producing research which is critical and useful (not always easy) is one way of doing this.

Bev Skeggs’ *Formations of Class and Gender*. The novel would have to be something I haven’t read yet. Maybe *The Luminaries* by Eleanor Catton as it’s over 800 pages long so I could also use it as a step to reach up into the trees.

**Ruth McDonald**  
*Professor of Governance and Public Management*  
Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, UK
Serendipity & curiosity: it was sociology that found me! I got astray from engineering (my initial career) after crossing the lecture “Introduction to sociology” of an Argentinean professor: so thrilling! It has been “love at first sight” for the subject, for me a key to understand how the world works.

Social inequalities (especially gender) and stratification issues (especially those linked to family arrangements and social relations). Because justice and equ(al)ity have been central concerns for me since childhood: always felt the urge to readdress the (growing) inequality all around.

Certainly research! I’ve had the luck to contribute to several interesting research projects and networks with great colleagues. I’ve learnt a lot, had fun, taken part in unforgettable exchanges and discussions… and spent nights and week-ends getting lost following intuitions. Discoveries make me feel able to contribute in some way.

It can change the world “as we know it”!


While taking a degree in political science I realized I was most interested in the way society works. Some authors, like Weber and the Frankfurt school, and later Foucault, were quite influential in this respect.

Environmental sociology, science and technology studies and political sociology. All three seem to me extremely relevant and challenging also from a professional viewpoint since they (especially the first two) are placed at the crossroads with other disciplines, languages, frameworks.

Possibly publications because writing is what gives me the greatest pleasure (not sure it’s the same for readers…), but the other activities give different yet no lesser pleasures, like being surprised by emerging empirical evidence one would not expect, or getting the feeling one has been able to convey effectively some relevant ideas to an audience.
Bringing society back in (we badly need it after so many decades of Thatcherism)! And what we chose as title of next conference: not just criticism but also sociological imagination.

I’d have to pick *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Adorno and Horkheimer and any book of Alice Munro or José Saramago’s books that I might have at hand.

Originally I had planned another career (as a teenager it took a long time before I even knew about sociology), but in the process I got interested in anthropology. However, I assumed job chances would be better with sociology and just as fun. So I decided dreams work best when you can pay your bills. I also wanted to be involved in social change and realised that sociological research does make an impact. My master thesis (more correctly the old more extensive Norwegian “hovedfag”) paved way to change the neutral, but gender biased tax law for women, in particular, who worked in private companies with spouses as co-owners. As long as we live gendered lives, gender-neutral laws have gendered effects, so removing structural barriers is a good start. It was an enjoyable experience to see that my choice to become a sociologist was a good choice. For my first job I choose a one-year job as a lower-paid research assistant over a well-paid permanent job in one of the Ministries showing that sociologists are willing to take risks. It did pay off: It took me to my research interests.

My interest in distribution of welfare materialised in the first national study of fringe benefits in private companies and by time took me to a long research collaboration with Mzumbe University in Tanzania, East-Africa where we (master- and PhD students included) have lately explored the welfare benefits in private companies in Dar es Salaam. In parallel with this I have been doing ethnographic research on Asian business in East-Africa. These experiences have been good for methodological reflections such as “Could there be other ways of getting at local contexts in non-western settings?” and “If so, how?” including Cicero’s “Cui bono?” Colonialism still keeps creeping into cross-cultural research by a complex mix of mediators perpetuating the western hegemony in research into “neo-” rather than “post-colonialism”.

Apart from the many publications, this work has also resulted in a number of talks at western and African universities (Tanzania, Malawi, South-Africa, Sudan, etc.) to discuss the assumption of western universalism and contextual alternatives. To also read Asian, African and Arab sociological works has been good for reflecting upon sociological knowledge production, and crucially if sociology aims at social change, not only outside Europe, but also in a culturally more complex Europe. Put simply, there is never a dull day with sociology!
How can we single out these activities so closely linked? The successful efforts to generate external funding for research leads to my data upon which my publications are built. Eventually I bring them into my teaching. This is the classic circle. But, in our sector things do not exist until they are published.

In life outside the bureaucratic files, pride and joy are never fixed. It feels very good to see my work published and even better when in references, but it also feels very good when my students tell me that coming to my office for supervision makes them happy and filled with energy to go on. In just the way, their good feedback on my teaching gives me the same boost. We are never too old for compliments!

My students tell me that the best way to get the intellectual message over is when I also draw on my own research in particular when it comes to complex matters, so using my own research works well to invite my audience on-board. The ability to tell a story and to go on from there still works. The circle is back, but as an untidy, unpredictable and at times an overwhelming and lovely mess.

As a previous chair of RN20 Qualitative Research I will point to the sociological skills “how to find out”. C. Wright Mills’ “The sociological imagination” calls for our curiosity – what is it that we see out there - what is this phenomenon?

C. Wright Mills (who died 50 years ago) argues that the sociological imagination makes us see the individual and the structure (or history and biography) and the relations between the two. To recognise this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst. That, he claims, is to possess the sociological imagination.

To sum up, the sociological analyst needs to possess particular skills to explore observations compared to lay people – a matter of great concern particularly in qualitative research. If we employ the same knowledge as the social actors we are to study, we recognise and explore the everyday structures by using the same resources or the common-sense social categories in everyday language of those we study. This circular cognitive process increases the risk of reproduction (and it is why ethnomethodologists differentiate between topic and resource). This way, our sociological imagination offers to produce knowledge of great value to improve our contemporary society. This is our offer!
It's a difficult question. I had the chance to choose to be a sociologist. Very early I had interest in examining human society within larger social, political and economic contexts. Study the groups, cultures, institutions and the behavior of human beings gives us a greater understanding of human society. Also the use of results from research, by sociologists, to shape and revise public policies is very interesting; it gives the chance for sociologists to influence efforts to solve social problems.

Sociology of organisations, sociology of professions and sociology of health. I like to link these 3 areas. Why? I’m interested in understanding the interrelations between organisations and their societal situations, assimilating diverse contributions from other disciplines. It's very difficult to choose one of these professional activities. In my point of view, all of them are related. The outputs from research activity gives rise to publications and is transmitted to students and so on. I could imagine working only in one of these activities.

The scientific study of society (or sociology), because of its bearing upon many of the issues of the present world, assumed a great importance. Sociology can provide a body of knowledge that will enable to control the conditions of social life and improve them.

I can not make up my mind about it. Two books are not enough to take to a desert island.

Before registering for a degree programme leading towards a profession, in my case: either for mathematics or medicine/psychology, I granted permission to myself for taking one year of a general studies course, i.e. attending classes that I chose out of pure interest from the course catalogue: from sociology, philosophy, history, economics and psychology. That was my plan. I even did an internship in a hospital and I completed courses in maths. But the plan failed. After my "Humboldtian" year, I could not desist from continuing my exploration of those subjects, particularly of sociology. I was more than fascinated by this discipline. It opened eyes, it taught a mode of thinking that was far beyond what I had learnt elsewhere. That interest has persisted until today. Sociology invites us to think deeply about ourselves under the conditions of modernity, but, unlike e.g. philosophy, it additionally offers the tools for analysing the conditions that underlie our self-understanding. Isn’t it a great form of thought, knowledge for life?! Everyone should have the chance to get intellectually in touch with it.
Because my studies introduced me via the “historical” line of modern thought, as Foucault said, from Hegel, Marx, Weber (via phenomenology and systems theory) to attempts at gaining a sociological understanding of contemporary society, I fell in love with looking through the lenses of social theory right from the beginning. Theory raises the big questions, e.g. the transformation of sovereignty in the current global era. It provides guidance in the face of sociology’s internal fragmentation. It pervades the discipline by providing conceptual tools for sociological research. The good thing with theory is that it emerges everywhere in sociology. Each area in sociology needs and each fact calls for theory. We all draw on theory for building our arguments. Currently I am also concerned with the sociology of law, I studied the digital revolution, and pursued Bourdieu-style research projects on inequality and cultural taste.

One point in advance: I am not completely satisfied with the professional activities of the discipline, the development of sociology as a field to a field of careers, no longer concerned about the progress and impact of its intellectual enterprise, a concern that originally motivated me so much. Science has become a game where we globally compete against colleagues for scarce resources. This is one of the reasons that I enjoy our ESA activities which are off the individual track of promoting our fate as scholarly “entrepreneurial selves”.

However, making a small contribution to the intellectual realm that we all share is probably the most satisfying success in science. I have been lucky that my book “Critique of the Life-world”, applying historical epistemology to phenomenology, resulted in a new view to see things, that slowly seems to be developing a lasting impact on the understanding of interpretive sociology. In teaching, I introduced two things. First, in the nineties I used the Internet to create a virtual classroom including a class held at my home university and a class at JNU New Delhi. Second, later on, at Freiburg/Germany, I converted this curriculum into a non-virtual, much bigger, very successful and truly global “Global Studies” Master’s programme, which still exists.

I think only today it is time for sociology. Before the Great Depression, most state jobs were designed for lawyers. After 1929, the state began to hire economists in great numbers. But now, after the Great Recession a third type of experts is needed: sociologists.

Sociology offers the capacity to tackle the big questions. It offers answers that take into account not just one but various dimensions of the real world. What matters is not so much the concrete results of particular studies but the frames underlying the discourses in society, which are deeply “sociological” even if, of course, many people who apply these frames do not understand them as “sociological” schemes. I think the impact of sociology and other social sciences, including economics, on societal practices cannot be underestimated.
With respect to the careers of graduates, I have been surprised to find that graduates are advantaged by their study of fields that, such as sociology, are open, sometimes diffuse and particularly challenging if they include abstract analysis, complex projects or studying abroad under difficult circumstances. In this regard, sociologists are at the top of the league compared to graduates of other subjects. They are up to date, flexible, familiar with different modes of thinking, -- and they can communicate well! The individual skills in demand on the job market seem to require not so much factual knowledge but generic competencies.

Deserted, alone forever, on the one hand, I should carry a book that can be read again and again, on the other hand, I would go for an extensive and entertaining volume. My backpack would therefore include Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and, replacing your novel, one volume of Foucault’s *Dits et Ecrits*.

**PhD Student Award for the Best Research Paper in the Sociology of the Arts (RN-02)**

In 2013, the Research Network for the Sociology of the Arts (RN-02) launched a PhD Student Award, which will be offered biennially. The prize of €500 was funded from RN-02 membership fees. We asked for submissions of 6,000 to 8,000 words, which could be either empirically or conceptually based and should focus on topics of arts sociology (see RN02’s webpages). The contributions were expected to be original, authored only by PhD-students and should not have been published elsewhere. The Call for Papers stipulated the evaluation procedure – anonymous peer review by an international jury – as well as the other main criteria, such as the papers’ conception, methods, references, sociological relevance and readability.

Many PhD Students from several European countries responded to the Call for Papers and submitted a previously unpublished research paper. The topics covered various issues (e.g. analysis of particular artistic fields, analysis of museum visitors’ behaviour, exploration of the relations between artists and art markets, analysis of aesthetic evaluations related to public funding of the arts, investigation of aesthetic experience of non-professionals, discussion of the selection and effects of public monuments). The research papers submitted were very high quality and some of them were indeed excellent. The jury was delighted to announce the winner as *Ms Elena Pérez-Rubiales*, with her paper entitled “Art museum visitors: interaction strategies for sharing their experience”.

Elena Pérez-Rubiales has a degree in Art History and she is currently a PhD candidate at the Centre for Research and Studies in Humanities at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Last year she has published her first paper, “The unforgettable aesthetic experience: the relationship between the originality of artworks and local culture”, in Poetics (40/2012). Pérez-Rubiales’ research paper focused on the social dimension of the art museum experience, interpreting what happens before, during and after the visit. The author conducted 21 in-depth interviews with Spanish visitors to art museums. Her analysis shows that the modus of visiting an exhibition, e.g. alone or accompanied by friends or family members, reflects the visit strategies of individuals. As a result she states that “social and personal experiences do not cancel each other but may occur simultaneously during the visit or at different times and places depending on the visitors’ biographies, visit strategies and social restrictions.” The paper calls for a holistic understanding of visitors’ experiences by considering the pre-visit and post-visit periods.

Jury members justified their decision with reference to the “interesting way she [the author] focuses on social interactions before, during and after the museum visit” as well to the excellent prose quality of the paper. The prize was formally awarded in Turin during the Business Meeting of the Research Network Sociology of the Arts, on August 29th, 2013.
The study of culture is the fastest growing area in both European and North American sociology. After years of mild neglect, political sociology is also re-establishing itself as a central plank of the discipline. The European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology aims to be a forum not so much for these fields of study considered separately, as for any work that explores the relationship between culture and politics through a sound sociological lens.

The journal takes an ecumenical view of 'culture': it welcomes articles that address the political setting, resonance or use of any of the arts (literature, art, music etc.), but it is also open to work that construes political phenomena in terms of a more philosophical or anthropological understanding of culture, where culture refers to the most general problem of meaning-formation. As for work that lies between these poles, it might address the relationship between politics and religion in all its forms, political symbolism past and present, styles of political leadership, political communication, the culture of political parties and movements, cultural policy, artists as political agents, and many other related areas.

The journal is not committed to any particular methodological approach, nor will it restrict itself to European authors or material with a European focus. It will carry articles with an historical as well as a topical flavour.

The journal aims to have a robust book reviews section, and while the language of reviews will be English, we wish to promote reviews of and review articles about significant new work written in other languages. The journal's most general aim is to foster and perhaps rekindle the sort of intellectually urbane sensibility that was once a staple of the sociological tradition.

Please submit your article online via the journals ScholarOne™ Manuscripts site:

http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/recp
Which crisis? Whose critique? What changes?


From the 28th to the 31st August 2013, about 2,700 sociologists from all over Europe and beyond gathered in Turin, Italy, to debate about the current crisis from different perspectives, bring in a sociological view and discuss on possible paths ahead. The Department of Culture, Politics and Society, in its new location, was excited to host the organization of this outstanding conference and receive so many colleagues from around the world.

This 11th edition of ESA biannual Conference confirmed a growing trend with respect to the previous editions (2,762 papers have been presented, out of the over 4,000 abstracts submitted, in the 672 sessions being organized), attracting more scientists than ever, an increasing number of contributions and an ever more heterogeneous pool of participants (from 67 different countries!), in an attempt to understand and overcome the crisis we are experiencing in Europe. In addition to the 13 Research Streams that met in Turin, the number of Research Networks (RNs) increased to 36. We also welcomed a much larger number of Joint Sessions involving 2 or 3 RNs. RN28 Society and Sports was particularly active in organizing Joint Sessions. Indeed, this reflects the multi-faceted topic of this conference: our focus wasn’t solely upon the debt crisis, but these sessions also reflected upon its wider social and political elements. There were four days chock-full of great discussions and suggestions, where pragmatism and utopianism shared the floor with scientific respect and mutual recognition.

The structure of the Scientific Program changed from previous editions: the Special and Semi-Plenary Sessions were been grouped in the mornings, and the new short Midday Specials were introduced without any overlap with the other RN/RS sessions, thus enabling all participants to attend their chosen regular sessions.

Inspired by the Conference theme “Crisis, Critique and Change”, the Local Organizing Committee decided for the first time to introduce the concept of “Social Responsibility” to serve as guide and organizing principle. Inspired by this idea in every choice,
we aimed at reducing as much as possible the environmental impact of such a large event, while at the same time maximizing the social returns at a local level. For example, each Conference bag was produced in Italy and hand printed by the Cooperative “Il Margine” (Arealab), employing men and women with psychological disabilities, thus promoting labour market integration for disadvantaged workers. The young musicians and singers from “Pequeñas Huellas” (a project led by Sabina Colonna-Preti, teacher at the Conservatory of Music in Turin) opened the Plenary Session on the stage of the Teatro Regio, followed by a reception prepared by “Liberamensa” (as for the coffee-breaks and the lunch boxes), a project training and employing some of Torino prison’s inmates.

We also promoted the use—whenever possible—of tap water, by offering compostable water bottles in the conference kit, and reduced the printed material by distributing for the first time the Full Program in digital format on a USB key and by distributing to the entire audience only a more synthetic Pocket Program, containing all the general information and sessions. The online program, available on the Conference website, allowed each participant to consult it online and to set a personalized program by date or by RN/RS, thus establishing a personal schedule that was printed by participants at the Internet Point.

With the aim to promote wider participation and in order to help meet the challenges that the current economic crisis imposes on Universities and delegates’ budgets, Turin afforded over 700 places (around half of which were filled) in University accommodation (EDISU) at very competitive rates. These were either a few steps away from or next to the conference venues, which seemed to be highly appreciated.

Lastly, one innovative idea introduced at this conference was “Easy ESA for children”, the provision of flexible onsite childcare solutions for parents attending with their children. We were very happy to testify how this “family friendly” profile brought to the campus many young children (and even babies), strolling around the conference venues with their parents during the breaks. We very much hope that this idea can spread further.

In order to know if our choices have met your expectations and for improving in future conferences, we asked participants to take part in a survey and give us feedbacks about their experiences. The response rate was rather good, with a 43% of participants responding. Over half of our respondents added a free, synthetic comment. Thanks again for your feedback!

The vast majority of survey participants were either highly or rather satisfied with the various aspects of the Conference (all items reached at least 80% positive scores in
satisfaction rates). In particular, the concept of the Social Responsibility was appreciated by over the 95% of the respondents (and highly appreciated by over 85%). Also our efforts to save the environment by reducing as much as possible the printed material received a positive feedback: for the 66% of respondents the USB (memory stick) was the preferred option for receiving the Abstract Book and for over 75% of participants the on-line Program has been fine, even if for some improvements could be made.

Also the commitment of the organizers - Local Organizer Committee, Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) and IT team - has been highly appreciated by over 70% of respondents. The reputation of the Italian cuisine was a huge challenge for us and we were happy to read enthusiastic comments about the long-lasting generous coffee breaks, the welcome reception and the catering of the Social Dinner at the Valentino Castle, although we didn’t manage to match your gastronomic expectations for what concerns the lunch boxes (an often criticized item in the free format comments). With regard to food: you might be relieved to know that what was left over after the coffee breaks hasn’t been wasted, but it was offered to convicts at the end of each day.

As gathered from the survey, the most important reasons to attend the Conference have been the abstract presentation and networking, as two participants stated in the free comments:

"I believe the conference was a great experience for networking, and presenting our work. The sessions were very stimulating and informative. I would like to thank all who worked so hard to make this happen with a great success.

I really appreciated the theme. It is the main reason I chose to attend the conference. I also enjoyed the diversity of researchers and presentations. I attended sessions every day of the conference! I never do that!!"

The main Conference Venue, the Campus Luigi Einaudi, recently inaugurated, was also appreciated because the structure (designed by Foster & partners), aided by the nice weather, offered different spaces to keep on discussing presentations and to network with colleagues, as this participant wrote:

"The main building had a courtyard where people could meet in nice weather and talk and network freely.

So we will definitely pass our successful “rain dance” to the Local Organizing Committee of Prague …together with the rainfall analysis of the previous decades made by Tiziana!"
Also the city, Turin, has positively surprised many participants (hopefully you also found some time to enjoy some of its many museums, art galleries, restaurants and bars), and we wish to see you coming back again to better explore the city and the surrounding region. We hope to see many of you again in Prague, as 83% of the respondents declared that they intend to participate in the ESA 2015 conference. We wish the next LOC good luck for this exhausting but also rewarding experience.

Hoping that this 11th ESA Conference has been a fruitful one for your scientific research and your future Projects and that you have good memories of the Conference, Turin and our team, and we look forward to welcome you again as visitors to the Department and to the city in the occasion of future events!

Tiziana Nazio & Claudia Giordano
(Local Organising Committee)
The University in Crisis?

On the transformation of European universities and the commercialization of knowledge

European universities today are objects of many far-reaching changes and reforms. As a consequence of this major transformation, politicians, students, teachers, scientists and not least the public are confronted with different kinds of problems. This poses some very important questions: What can or should public higher education be and what are the functions of the public university in this day and age where the market logic dominates nearly all areas of life? Is the university in crisis?

In the second ESA lecture entitled “On the University”, which took place at ESA’s 11th Conference, two Sociologists from the UK and Italy presented their opinions on the status of the university in their home countries. John Holmwood from the University of Nottingham brought forward some arguments about the neoliberal knowledge regime and public higher education based on the UK experience but using very general arguments about crisis and education systems.

Holmwood argues that in the United Kingdom there has been a shift from a social democratic to a neoliberal knowledge regime. In the past, there was the idea of a knowledge society with an inclusive public interest (there was the common belief that mass higher education would lead to a decline in socio-economic inequalities and would facilitate wider inclusion and participation in common culture and public debate). As a consequence of the neo-liberal public policies and with the establishment of a neo-liberal knowledge regime (from the 1980s onwards) this idea of wider values of public higher education was replaced by a knowledge regime which limited the “public” value to economic growth (but an economic growth which does not benefit all).

This new regime was shown quite plainly in the Browne Review (published in 2010), which considered the future direction of higher education funding in England. As the report shows, education is no longer seen as a social right but as an investment in human capital and private responsibility of the individual. The Paper recommended the end of the direct funding of teaching for some programs and the entry of for-profit providers to grant competition. As a consequence, there was a polarization of the university system, with high-cost high value education for the elite on the one hand and low cost-low value education for the masses on the other hand. Under these circumstances, university as a knowledge corporation internally becomes a microcosm of widening inequality found externally.

Besides teaching, the report had significant effects on scientific research. As Holmwood stated, a commercialization of research could be noticed in recent years. The marketization of university research arose to some extent through the idea that there should be no public funding unless there is a private beneficiary. There was also a certain license, which contributed to this process: under the disguise of “open access” the Creative Commons (CC-BY) allows commercial (and non-commercial) usage of research findings on the condition that the creator is appropriately credited. Thus it facilitates the commercialization of knowledge.

From a neo-liberal point of view, many social actions and forms of social organization are seen as distortions of the market, because they are considered to be inconsistent with the principle of rationalism that neoliberalism stands for. According to Holmwood, public higher education is being transformed by the “anti-democratic” privatization of the public university. What we have to do as sociologists is to call attention to the importance of the public interest and to go beyond the dichotomy between market and state.

The second part of the midday-special was dedicated to Italy: Massimiliano Vaira from the University of Padua explained the historical evolution of the Italian university system and in his very detailed presentation he showed the consequences and effects of the delegitimizing rhetoric addressed against public university and reform policies in the last decade.

When I left the lecture hall after the midday-special, I noticed that, despite the clear answer of both speakers (“Yes, the university is in crisis”), there was a good mood among the audience. Maybe it resulted from the lively and partially funny way in which the speeches were given. Perhaps it was due to the fact that the listeners in this moment had the same thought: “Fortunately this is not the case in my home country.” In Austria there is a heated debate about student fees and university reforms as well. But after having heard the lectures from Holmwood and Vaira, I became aware that the situation in Austria—even though there are many problems concerning the educational system—seems far better than in other European countries. I can count myself lucky to be a student from the University of Innsbruck without having to pay for it. Let’s see how long this privilege lasts!

Sandra Pletzer

Master’s Degree Student in Sociology, University of Innsbruck, Austria
Reflections, Outlooks and Big Questions: On the Status of the Discipline

Saturday August 31st a mid-day session was held entitled “On the Status of the Discipline”. Just as the complementary “ESA lecture” on the situation of the universities (“University in Crisis”), this session was also very well attended. The invited participants were asked to reflect on the status of the discipline, the outlooks into the future were slightly more optimistic. This does not mean that it resulted in a self-laudation of sociology. On the contrary, there were many critical remarks about the current status of our discipline. But still next to the critical remarks made by the three speakers there were also some suggestions on how to overcome this issues and how to strengthen and consolidate the status of sociology as a discipline in contemporary society. The session started with Pekka Sulkunen’s talk (“Is a Science of Society Still Possible?”), which then was commented by the discussants Elena Danilova and Frank Welz. Both discussants also set out their own perspectives on the status of sociology. Pekka Sulkunen started out with some critical remarks on the shift of emphasis that has taken place in sociology during the past 40 years. Action and actors became the centre of attention and the role of social structures received far less emphasis. While criticizing this “end of the social” he also took a critical stance towards an over-emphasis of the social that absorbs, for example, the state and the nation. Instead, Pekka Sulkunen argued that a shift from action to agency (from the point of view of justification) is necessary. The contemporary “crisis of agency”, on which sociology should focus, results from the paradoxical role which the state played in the process of producing autonomous individuals in modern society. Just as the state helped individuals to assume their autonomy, it was never “neutral” but rather selective and repressive. Today the effects of this paradoxical role of the state result in a “crisis about autonomy” and a “crisis about intimacy”. It is these two contradicting principles that together result in the crisis of agency.

Elena Danilova shared Pekka Sulkunen’s concerns about the path that sociology took during the latter quarter of the 20th century and pointed to the particular danger that, under the influence of current neoliberal discourses, sociology might be reduced to a behavioural science. At the same time, however, she remained optimistic: throughout the conference there were repeated calls for a more general vision of social life. With regard to the role of sociology in society, Elena Danilova noted that professional sociologists must always be seen in relation to centres of power, especially when it comes to public sociology and the influence of sociology on public discourses. According to Danilova the call for an “end of isolation” (as advocated by Michael Burawoy and others) is a step in the right direction, but it is important to recognize that the broader social context in which sociology is embedded differs in each country. Even inside a single country, sociologists occupy different positions in relation to the dominant hierarchies of power. Just because sociology is involved in public discourse this doesn’t make it necessarily critical.

Frank Welz agreed with Pekka Sulkunen’s view that a “middle way” must be found, which finds a happy medium between too much focus upon action and an overemphasis of the social. However, Welz suggested some enhancements to Pekka Sulkunen’s conclusions. Whilst Sulkunen argued that sociology’s duty is not to be “neutral” towards the state, but rather that it should make people aware that we need a truly representative democracy. It should do this by recognizing and analyzing different interests groups in society; Frank Welz, by contrast, argued that such a call for a new representative democracy must be embedded in a historical frame. This could, he contended, be achieved by considering Michel Foucault’s writings on governmentality which can help us to understand that Pekka Sulkunen’s contemporary “autonomous” individuals are less autonomous but produced as “entrepreneurs of themselves” by a neoliberal governance. With regard to the groups mentioned by Sulkunen, the task of sociology is not only to identify them but to understand how they are “made”. All three speakers agreed that sociology should again have the courage to ask “big” questions about the core structures of contemporary society: the greater horizon should not disappear from the pictures we take. This danger exists in both empirical and theoretical work. In this way, it should also be easier for sociology to speak with a public voice, yet fragmentation and restrictive working in small niches make this task more complicated, if not impossible. However, besides this pessimistic diagnosis, Frank Welz also contributed a more optimistic view about the future of our discipline in practical regards: It could be (and at least should be) a potential outcome of the current Great recession that the demand for sociologists will rise. The growing scepticism towards the leading role that economics plays in contemporary society could lead to a growing number of state jobs designed for experts on the growing social tensions in society—just as economists replaced lawyers after the Great depression of the 1920s.

Of course, it is impossible to discuss all questions regarding the status of sociology in contemporary society and the future development of our discipline in one hour. Nonetheless, the questions that were raised in this session and the matters touched upon by the participants show that such reflections on the status of sociology are an important supplement to our daily sociological work. In the end, the answer to one big question is clear: Yes, a science of society is still possible today, but in order to ensure that it remains possible in the future, such reflections upon and discussions about the “status of our discipline” are indispensable.

Josef Untermarzoner
Master’s Degree Student in Sociology, University of Innsbruck, Austria
The ESA 2013 Turin conference was historical in the sense that the attempt by the ESA President Pekka Sulkunen (2011–2013) to change our statutes lost dramatically in a show of hands-vote where the two alternatives were either not to change the rules at all or change them article by article according to the proposal of the ESA executive. The drama was complete when five minutes afterwards, Pekka was declared the loser in the ESA election for President. This loss had to do with the statutes proposal, as Pekka had otherwise proved to be an efficient and active president.

The change of statutes was not exceptional: ESA has changed statutes in almost all conferences, after the executive in which I sat, was able to go around the extremely demanding conditions of the first statutes (which were meant to be permanent). We made the rules more flexible and so the statutes can now be changed by a majority of those present in the General Assembly. Pekka has participated in the previous statute changes, which made possible that the President can sit two terms, and he tried now to get a mandate for the second term. But he tried also to change the statutes in a very comprehensive manner, with additional bylaws.

These proposed changes were argued to be necessary because of the French law. Our present statutes, it was said were not compatible with the requirement of registration by the French law and therefore a lawyer had been employed to make changes which would enable us to get legal status in France. But these legally necessitated changes had been complemented by a large number of other changes that had nothing to do with the legal requirements. And in these changes was included also one change that would have thrown out a sacred ESA principle: namely the equal number of candidates by gender in the presidential election. In the new proposal, only a loose requirement for representativity in gender, regions and scientific approaches was proposed.

Pekka argued in the defence of this change that it is so difficult to get female candidates for president when only the gender requirement was invoked. Knowing Pekka, I can think that he has approached possible candidates with the argument that we need a second woman candidate and are asking you because of that. This is speculation but in any case I can assure that this proposal made many of the women members of ESA (a clear majority) very angry and certainly was one argument for the proposal to change only the legal requirements would have been accepted quite easily.

But to the statutes... As said above the argument for change was the French law, but most of the proposals had nothing to do with this. We were told that the statutes project had started long ago and that very much work had been done during the year before the congress. Unfortunately, this process had not been made public, and the proposal for statutes reached the members only a few weeks before the congress. As the proposal, then, was commented upon by members, the executive made last minute changes in its pre-congress meeting, but this proposal was not available in any form before the General Assembly.

We are in the situation that only the next congress can legislate our legal status, but this cannot be helped. It would have taken many hours to go through the statutes as Pekka had demanded, whereas the proposal to change only the legal requirements would have been accepted quite easily.

Following conclusions concerning ESA can be made:
1. Statute change process is best initiated in the beginning of a two-year period, and inform the membership early (as is done in the ISA, which now debates next year’s possible statute changes).
2. It is important to realize that the ESA executive is a directly voted body and does not represent any national associations or other groups. Therefore its positions are not necessarily the positions of the membership.
3. ESA has a majority of women and it has from the beginning emphasized gender equality strongly. There is no need to change that.
4. We MUST do something about voting participation. Voting in the congress must be made as easy and enticing as possible. The voting place must be where the people are, not invisible somewhere in the second floor. I never even saw where the voting desk was during the whole congress. As for the Internet voting, it was very simple; the membership number should be included in the email sent to the voters so that one does not need to seek it somewhere in one’s emails!

J P Roos
ESA president 2007-2009
Professor emeritus
University of Helsinki, Finland
The European Sociological Association (ESA) is seeking applicants for the positions of Editor-in-Chief, Assistant Editor and Book Reviews Editor for European Societies.

Closing Date: 31st March 2014

ABOUT THE JOURNAL
European Societies (ES) is the journal of the European Sociological Association and is published by Routledge (Taylor & Francis). As an international platform for the sociological discourse on European developments, ES publishes research on Europe rather than research by Europeans. The journal covers social theory and analysis on three levels: the European level itself, comparative research on Europe, and Europe in international perspective. Concentrating on the present, ES articles examine themes reflecting recent and significant changes in Europe from a cross-disciplinary viewpoint. The journal is essential reading for all sociologists, economists, political scientists and social policy analysts wishing to keep abreast of the very latest debates. The journal is in its 15th year and currently publishes five issues per year in English. Details about the journal are available at the following website: www.tandfonline.com/reus.

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  • assigning manuscripts to referees for evaluation,
  • accepting articles following successful peer review,
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All applicants or teams of applicants are kindly asked to submit the following:

a) A Vision Statement
Set forth your goals and plans for the content of the Journal. This may include an assessment of the current strengths, weaknesses, or gaps that you plan to address and how you will operationalize your plan; up to two pages please.

b) Background Information
The name, affiliation, and other relevant information about the candidate. Please describe the qualifications that support your appointment. Of particular importance is evidence to show the ability and experience of the Editor to provide sound judgment and guidance to potential authors. Please also provide a clear description of the structure of the editorial office and responsibilities, as you envision them at this point.

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Please include a list of published works.

Applications should be emailed to Sokratis Koniordos, Chair of the Editorial Board, by the end of March 2014 at the latest: skoni@social.soc.uoc.gr

Applications will be reviewed by the Search Committee immediately after the deadline submission date. The final selection will be taken by the journal’s Editorial Board and the Executive Committee of the ESA. Please note that all members of the Editorial team are expected to be members of the European Sociological Association.

All applications will be treated as strictly confidential.
Nelson Mandela was a big man and his long life was punctuated by huge personal and political achievements. Foremost among his personal achievements was the dignity and apparent lack of bitterness with which he emerged from 27 years of imprisonment by the apartheid regime in South Africa. He had the personal grace to embody the long struggle against racism and for democracy when he re-entered the public sphere in 1990, after having set a charismatic example of leadership during his own long years in jail. During much of this period Mandela was himself rather forgotten in the wider world: out of sight in the 1960s, eclipsed in the 1970s by the Black Consciousness Movement and Steve Biko and denounced in the 1980s by various world leaders (including Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and George Bush Senior) as a terrorist. Toward the end of this period, however, he was increasingly lionised in political and cultural circles and finally turned into a cult figure.

Foremost among his political achievements was, of course, the role he played in steering South Africa from apartheid to democracy, from a state in which to be black was to be less than human to one man, one woman, one vote. This was no easy road. There was violence from members of the old regime, from Zulu nationalists in the Inkatha Movement, from white ultra-nationalists in the AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging), and not least from among some black radicals (including Mandela’s wife, Winnie) within the black townships. Once in power as the first President of the new South Africa, Mandela formed a government of national unity with the Afrikaner Nationalists and Inkatha, oversaw the drafting of the new constitution including a strong bill of rights and gave the go-ahead for Bishop Tutu to establish his famous Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

One of the many iconic moments of the Rainbow Nation Mandela sought to establish was presenting the Rugby World Cup trophy, held in South Africa, to the Springboks captain Francois Penaar. Rugby was a generally white sport and those of us who remember the anti-apartheid demonstrations we held against the visiting Springboks will understand the symbolism of this occasion. Mandela was, however, a human being and in spite of all the efforts to sanctify him, we do him no honour to subsume his politics, or indeed his patrician personality, beneath an aura of sainthood. In any event, sanctification is in general the last refuge of scoundrels acting for the narrowest of self-interest.

Mandela came from a Christian, aristocratic and propertied African family – very different in culture and social status from the mass of ‘blanket’ Africans. He became a lawyer and was very much involved in ANC politics in the 1950s. He was active in the non-violent Defiance campaign and then in organising the Congress of the People in 1955, which put forward the famous and at the time controversial Freedom Charter:

“We the people of South Africa declare for all our country: That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people”.

In a context of plural political movements vying for popular support, the notion of “we the people” had obvious political advantages for the ANC, but what was more important was that it set a basically multi-racial path for the liberation movement.

There has been much debate over whether Mandela ever joined the South African Communist Party, which had strong Soviet connections, but he certainly worked closely with its members. What first thrust Mandela into international fame, his first moment of glory, was perhaps his least auspicious contribution. He was involved in the late 1950s in the turn to armed struggle, the establishment of an armed wing of the ANC, known as MK or Umkhonto We Sizwe and the reorganisation of the party in accordance with the ‘M-Plan’, setting up a cell structure for military operations. Mandela was acquitted at the long drawn out Treason Trial of 1956-61, but he was then convicted of ‘sabotage’ at the Rivonia Trial in 1962 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The so-called turn to armed struggle was a disaster. The bombing campaigns were ineffective and those involved in them were quickly rounded up. More importantly, the mass democratic campaigns, which rocked the apartheid regime in the latter half of the 1950s, all quickly collapsed as sabotage, secrecy and
vanguardism took over. The murder by the police of 69 protesters at Sharpeville – a protest organised by the PAC, a rival organisation to the ANC – was treated by the ANC/SACP leadership as a sign that peaceful protest was no longer possible. However, it was also a sign that the mass democratic movement as a whole – which comprised community movements, trade union movements, women’s movements and even tribal peasant movements – was seriously impacting on the apartheid regime.

After the turn to armed struggle there ensued a decade of state repression and intensified racist legislation, marked by the defeat of popular struggles. I do not think this downturn can be separated from the ill advisedness of the ‘turn’ Mandela helped to implement. Mandela was inspired, as many radicals were in that period, by Castro’s 26th Movement, the example of Che Guevara and by various armed African liberation movements. The long period of his prosecution in the Treason Trial may have cut him off from active involvement in the mass democratic movement. In any event the strategic turn taken by the ANC, which Mandela supported and personified, probably had more to do with the wider strategic turn enforced by leaders of the Soviet Union on most Communist Parties they controlled than with any local conditions. Mandela’s ringing speech at the Rivonia Trial – “I was the symbol of justice in the court of oppression” – was undoubtedly true, but did not address the democratic and class issues involved in turning away from mass struggle.

There was always an elitist and intolerant edge to the ANC movement, but it was the turn to violence in 1961 that for many years broke its connection with grassroots democracy. The protests that broke out in the mid-1970s, a decade and a half after Sharpeville, were conducted more out in the mid-1970s, a decade and a half — and even tribal peasant movements – was seriously impacting on the apartheid regime.

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Once Mandela was out of prison in 1990, his conciliatory strengths were manifold; he certainly deserved the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. There was at the time violence in the air – the murder of Chris Hani, massacres at Sebokeng and at Shell House, the AWB car bombs, the ‘necklacing’ of ‘collaborators’ committed by young activists in the townships, even the tortures and murders committed by the Winnie Mandela’s thuggish ‘United Football Club’. Directly or indirectly, Mandela helped to resolve tensions between the independent unions and the ANC and the former head of the Mine-workers Union, Cyril Ramapoza, led the ANC delegation into negotiations with the government.

Mandela was a force for reconciliation but this did not mean that he simply gave in to stronger forces. He was for example critical of de Klerk, the leader of the Afrikaner Nationalists, when the latter granted amnesty to the police and defended his old Defence Minister, Malan. However, reconciliation also meant reconciling oneself to forces that were intent on keeping the great majority of ordinary black people in poverty and subjection. Mandela’s undoubted strengths were also his weaknesses.

The ambitious social and economic plans of the ANC-SACP, articulated in the election campaign of 1994 in the Reconstruction and Development Programme, were frustrated by business friendly policies (tight budgets, free trade, debt responsibility, etc.), the allure of unheard of riches corrupting all manner of officials, and an increasingly evident anti-pluralist streak within the ANC and SACP themselves. The trade union independence so carefully built up in the 1980s was compromised by its alliance with the ANC and SACP in the 1990s. By the time Mandela decided not to stand again as President in 1999, there were pronounced signs of growing unemployment, inequality and governmental authoritarianism – as well as the peculiarities of certain policy traits like Mbeki’s unbelievable refusal to recognize the existence of AIDS or the importance of anti-viral treatment.

Mandela was not uncritical of his own role, including that of giving Mbeki a free rein on the AIDS question, but whether or not he spoke out publicly on these issues, he remained a force for decency in the background of a state that was becoming disturbingly violent, anti-egalitarian and grasping. The police murder of 34 striking miners at Marikana mine, owned by a British company Lonmin, one of whose handsomely paid directors is Cyril Ramapoza, the former leader of the Mine-workers Union and Deputy leader of the ANC, and its cover up by leading figures in the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance, is one notorious example.

Mandela will be missed today not because he was a perfect role model – he was certainly no saint – but because he knew what was important in life and represented something authentic in the South African revolutionary tradition. Now that he has gone, I wonder what is in store for the revolution, which his presence did much to foster and civilise but which his aura served to insulate from the normal processes of intellectual and political criticism.

Robert Fine is Emeritus Professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Warwick. He is currently researching and writing in the areas of human rights, anti-semitism and cosmopolitan social theory. He sits on the ESA’s Executive Committee and is a board member of RN15 (Global, Transnational and Cosmopolitan Sociology) and RN 31 (Racism and Antisemitism). He co-edited, with Christine Achinger (German Studies), a special issue of European Societies on “Racism, Antisemitism and Islamophobia”. He has also co-edited, with Daniel Chernilo, a special issue of the Journal of Classical Sociology on “Natural law and social theory”. He is pursuing research on human rights and social theory and preparing a monograph on modernity and anti-semitism. His monographs include Cosmopolitanism (Routledge 2007); Democracy and the Rule of Law: Marx’s Critique of the Legal Form (Blackburn Press 2002; Pluto 1984 and 1985); Political Investigations: Hegel, Marx, Arendt (Routledge 2001); Being Stalked: A Memoir (Chatto and Windus, 1997); Beyond Apart- heid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa (with Dennis Davis, Pluto 1990).
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