



Conference 2007 Newsletter

Sociology for all?

A warm welcome to the conference 2007 edition of Sociology for all? Sociologists Outside Academia was launched exactly one year ago at the BSA Annual Conference 2006, so today is our 'official' first anniversary! We have come along in leaps and bounds and our numbers have grown steadily, with lots of BSA members and non-members from all walks of life joining us. Included in this Conference Special Edition is a brief history of the group's exciting development, a summary of our achievements to-date, a summary of issues raised more recently by new members and how to join us and add your voice to the growing numbers of Sociologists who are located largely outside of academia.

the story so far

April 2006 saw the exciting launch, at the BSA Annual Conference, of a new group which was soon to become known as 'Sociologists Outside Academia' (SOAg). The group emerged initially through the coming together of a small number of BSA members who shared the common experience of being situated largely outside of academia and who had faced a lack of recognition and status as professionals, little institutional support and a degree of marginalisation from the wider sociological community.

The impetus for SOAg's development arose from Dr Siewpeng Lee's heart-felt article '**How being outside the academy stings**' (Network, Autumn 2003) in which she highlighted the prejudices experienced when the 'public' world of institutional sociology collides with the 'private' world of personal responsibilities and histories. Her past experiences of negative reactions from conference delegates to being unaffiliated to an academic institution and (worse?) being a 'full-time' mother on a career-break, were all too familiar to some of us!

In response to Dr Lee's letter, Dr Keith Kahn-Harris suggested in his 'Soapbox' article (Network, Spring 2004) that there may be many more sociologists out there who, either through choice or circumstance, work largely 'outside the academy' or do not have permanent institutional affiliations. He suggested that we '**should think about developing a sub-grouping within the BSA.**' Keith's comments struck a chord with many members who subsequently swamped him with e-mails of support, which he passed on to the BSA, resulting in the creation of a new post on the Executive Committee representing members located 'outside academia'. At first Keith was co-opted to the post followed by Dr. Helen Dilks. Events soon gained momentum and in summer 2005 a few of us met up over a wonderful vegetarian Indian buffet in London to discuss the issues that were important to us as sociologists situated seemingly outside the mainstream. We felt that a formal group within the BSA should be developed to pursue these issues and to support other 'non-academic' members who retain

a keen interest in sociology. Two founder members, Lynda Nicholson and Julie Cappleman-Morgan, were duly charged with taking over the helm and SOAg was subsequently born (named by popular vote).

Ethos

The group's ethos is to take a 'bottom-up' approach so that we can evolve to represent the needs and desires of the wide variety of BSA members who, for whatever reason, do not have full institutional / academic affiliations. We are therefore eager for others without full institutional support to join us and offer their ideas, suggestions and concerns.

Representation in the BSA

With Lynda now wishing to focus her attention on completing her PhD, Julie was joined in late 2006 by Annika Coughlin who filled Lynda's shoes as joint representative (co-opted) on the BSA Executive Committee. We are proud that SOAg is able to provide a vital link through which issues affecting members 'outside academia' can be fed directly to Executive level for due consideration. This has enabled SOAg members to make a real contribution to the development of a more inclusive and supportive BSA.

Our aims and objectives are to:

- Strengthen the idea that we are first and foremost sociologists regardless of our circumstances.
- Raise the profile and value of sociologists working largely outside the academy.
- Raise the status of sociological work undertaken beyond an academic context.
- Raise awareness of the need to support new and 'budding' sociologists and others not working directly within the discipline but who hold a keen interest in it
- Provide a forum through which our interests, views and concerns can be related to the BSA so that appropriate support and recognition is afforded to all sociologists. ***So please join and help us make a difference!***

our achievements

Bringing to the BSA's attention the problem of accessing electronic library resources when one is not affiliated to an academic institution. This is a complex issue and ways are currently being considered by the Executive Committee of supporting independent researchers and scholars in gaining inexpensive access to electronic resources which are vital to their work.

Bringing to the BSA's attention the marginalisation felt by independent researchers and scholars when unable to include their 'institution' in journal article submissions and conference booking forms.

The BSA will now be amending conference and event booking forms to allow delegates to specify their occupational status and contacts details as they wish. Following consultation with registered SOAg members, BSA publications will also be adopting the same approach.

Raising awareness of the diversity of BSA membership to include sociologists who work outside academia and / or do not have permanent institutional affiliations. As a result of communications with various BSA publications, article submissions are now actively encouraged from sociologists of all backgrounds and areas of work (including retired members and all those with interests in sociology). In response to communications with SOAg, the editors of Network (the BSA newsletter) are proposing a 'special edition' on diversity with the BSA some time in 2008.

The creation of our own web-page on the BSA website: <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/specialisms/soa>

The creation of our own web-forum on the BSA website: <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/phpbb>

Further Issues raised by new members currently being considered / actioned include:

- Lack of realistic concessionary BSA membership and conference delegate rates for those on low income
- Possibility that the BSA could provide a

professional 'registration' service to support and endorse appropriately qualified and experienced independent researchers.

- To raise awareness of the difficulties in older 'new career sociologists' in gaining long-term and secure employment within and outside of academia.

We hope our achievements have inspired you to join us so that you too can contribute towards developing an inclusive and diverse BSA, and ultimately a sociological community that recognises and values the work of sociologists and social researchers of all social, educational and employment backgrounds.

what SOA offers you:

The opportunity for you to 'have your say' by raising issues with us that can be fed directly to the BSA Executive Committee for consideration.

Networking opportunities.

We are planning to hold our first informal meeting of SOAg members in Birmingham in late June / early July (for further details contact Annika or Julie). In addition to the communication opportunities our web-forum offers all sociologists, we are compiling an exclusive SOAg members' contact list to enable those with similar interests to contact each other directly.

Four newsletters per year.

Our newsletter 'Sociology for All?', provides news and reviews of sociological events and publications, opportunities for members to contribute articles on anything they feel is of importance sociologically and professionally. It also includes profiles and achievements of group members, information on sociological and research resources and articles of interest. All contributions are welcome!

Periodic e-bulletins to update members on current issues.

Periodic consultations on BSA membership and other sociological issues.

how to join

Fill in a registration form available online at www.britsoc.co.uk/specialisms/soa

Contact us

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All BSA members and non-members welcome.
It's YOUR SOA group! Be involved as much or as little as you like!



Julie Cappleman-Morgan



Annika Coughlin



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