



Sociology for all?

Newsletter

of the

BSA's **Sociologists Outside Academia** group (SOAg)

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Note: Any views or opinions expressed in 'Sociology for All?' are those of the contributors only and are not endorsed by the BSA.

A warm welcome to the second edition of '**Sociology for all?**'

It has been a very busy and exciting few months for Julie and Lynda in our joint roles as co-editors of this newsletter and co-representatives on the BSA Executive Committee (EC) for members who are located largely outside academia. We are pleased to report a number of positive developments for our fledgling group and hope that you will continue to support us and contribute to its further development.

News

Group 'launch' at BSA Annual Conference 2006

Lynda and Julie held a very successful 'meet and greet' session at the BSA Annual Conference in Harrogate in April 06. 'Non-academics' and academics alike expressed their support and congratulations on the group's launch, with a number stating enthusiastically that it was 'about time' that members 'outside academia' had proper representation. A number of delegates joined the group at the event, with many more taking copies of our first newsletter and joining afterwards. The new members came from a variety of backgrounds and included part-time and full-time postgraduate students and others such as those working in public services and independent educational establishments.

Feedback from new members and delegates who contributed to our comments box demonstrated that they would like the group to facilitate networking opportunities, provide a forum through which members can share information and offer each other support and advice on sociological and independent research issues, and to feed back concerns to the BSA regarding sociological and professional issues.



Lynda & Julie prepare to 'meet & greet'.

We are now working on ways to meet these aims. As a start, Julie and Lynda have submitted an article to the BSA Network newsletter to mark the group's launch and to raise awareness of the needs of BSA members outside academia. We are keeping our fingers crossed that the article will feature in the Autumn edition and will subsequently encourage many other BSA members 'like us' to join our group!

What's in a name?

We are delighted to announce that our group now has an 'official' name! A call to registered members 'outside academia' to nominate a catchy name for the group resulted in five suggestions being offered: Sociologists Beyond; Sociologists Beyond Academia; Sociologists Outside Academia; Sociology for All, and Unaffiliated Sociologists.

Amazingly, four of the suggested names received an equal share of the vote, due most likely to the unfortunately low response rate. Julie and Lynda therefore took an 'executive decision' to opt for '**Sociologists Outside Academia**' group (SOAg), as although it was neither Julie nor Lynda's

personal first choice, it was similar to the name commonly used by the BSA Executive Committee and office staff for members in our situation, and it meant that we would not need to alter current website and e-mail details. Julie suggested adding the 'g' to SOA to differentiate it from the Society of Authors which, one voter had advised, already used this acronym. Thank you to all those who submitted names for nomination and to all those who took part in the vote.

We are also pleased to announce that the BSA Executive Committee's Finance and General Purpose group (F&GP) has awarded SOAg an initial 'start-up' grant of £200 to meet expenses. As we are in the unusual position of being neither a committee, nor a study group, we have been asked to produce an estimated budget for 2006 / 2007 following which F&GP will decide how much the group can be allocated in future. We anticipate (and hope) that any future funds will enable us initially to organise 'network' meetings for SOAg members and to meet the cost of producing flyers to publicise the group, newsletter production, travel expenses for group business and possibly to develop a web forum. We are very grateful to the BSA and F&GP group for recognising the value of SOAg and offering to support it financially.

Website developments

The BSA has kindly devoted a section on its website to SOAg under the 'Specialisms' section. Listed within the 'Study Groups' section (although we are not technically so) under the heading '**Outside Academia Group**', the web page can be accessed on:

<http://www.britsoc.co.uk/specialisms/OutsideAcademia.htm> and provides a summary of our group's aims and objectives plus links to our newsletters and application form to join SOAg.

Representation of sociologists 'outside academia'

At a recent Executive Committee meeting, the 'outside academia' reps suggested that the diversity of the sociological community might not be fully reflected by the content and editorship of academic sociological journals. The reps felt that the prerequisite specified in the recent call for nominations to the Editorial Board of 'Sociology' to have extensive experience of prior publications (minimum of 3) and to have refereed a minimum of 5 articles for a peer-reviewed journal, might be perceived as 'exclusive' by sociologists 'outside academia' who may have fewer opportunities to contribute to academic literature. The EC explained that although experience of prior publication must remain a prerequisite, this however can include book reviews, which all sociologists are open to conduct whether or not they are affiliated to an academic institution. Peer reviewing is also open to all. We would therefore encourage all members with a wish to see sociology expand and become more inclusive of 'non-academics' to consider furthering their sociological involvement in this way - particularly if wishing in future to become involved editorially with BSA-linked sociological journals.

Further to issues of the marginalisation of sociologists located 'outside academia', a common situation expressed by a number of SOAg members has been how 'non-academics' should identify themselves and their academic 'affiliation' when completing conference delegate forms and submitting articles and letters to sociological publications. Many have in the past 'affiliated' themselves to their former universities even though they now have no formal link with them. Others such as independent researchers have identified themselves as affiliated to their funding bodies. Those who have taken the bull by the horns and identified themselves as unaffiliated to any organisation, or perhaps on a 'career break' have sometimes found themselves subjected to negative reactions or indifference at conferences etc (see Drs Keith Kahn-Harris and SiewPeng Lee's biographies in Issue 1). This matter has now been raised with the EC with a view to finding ways to change this culture to be more inclusive of all types of sociologists. Lynda has also been in contact with the editorial team of Sociology, who would like to work with SOAg to agree a suitable term to describe unaffiliated authors, for example, John Smith, Independent Scholar. Please email your suggestions to the BSA Publications Manager, Libby Marks, at libby.marks@britsoc.org.uk and forward a copy to us here at 'Sociology for All?'

Biographies

More 'people like us!'

Here's your chance to tell the sociological world about yourself and how sociology features in your life, whether as part of your work, retirement, or general interest. We hope to make this biographical section a regular feature of the newsletter. If you would like to contribute to SOAg's goal of raising awareness of the diversity of the BSA membership, please send a small autobiographic piece of around 600 words plus a photo (optional) for us to publish in a future edition of 'Sociology for All?' (Please see contact details at the end of the newsletter).

Our biographies this issue focus on the experiences of two members at different stages of their sociological careers who share in common a desire to maintain their involvement with the learning environment, and for whom sociology remains an important aspect of their lives. The first contributor, Annika Coughlin, describes taking her first steps in a sociological career, while the second, Terence Chivers, demonstrates the continued value of learning and sociology in life beyond official 'retirement':

(Continued overleaf)

Annika Coughlin

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When my university course ended it felt like that was it - you're not allowed back in to have contact with the tutors or to use the library (although most university libraries do allow alumni 'reference only' passes but they don't seem to advertise that!). So after my BA (hons) at the University of Bedfordshire I went on to do an MA in Social Research at Goldsmiths College as I missed being in a learning environment.

After the MA I still didn't feel like I'd quite had my fix, so I got a job working in the University of Bedfordshire library as an information assistant two nights a week. I now have access to all those books I miss, have learnt so much about library-based research tools and have more confidence in networking with different departments within the university.



I volunteered to speak in a one hour seminar on a BA Applied Social Studies research module about my experiences of designing, carrying out and analysing a participant observation study that I did for my MA dissertation. It was nerve wracking to speak in front of the class but I was pleased that the students said they were glad to hear about a student's experience rather than a professor with lots of publications who tend to make the research process sound slick and trouble free, which of course it isn't!

At present I am doing some volunteer work in the social studies department on a Joseph Rowntree funded study about young people and heavy cannabis use. This has involved contacting agencies to see if they would participate, transcribing interview tapes and I have used my newly acquired skills to assist the project leader on database searches.

Doing work for free has been a great experience and I would recommended it to anyone who feels a bit lost and unsure about what they want to do, or what they feel they are capable of doing. After doing voluntary work on a research project I know the processes involved, the ups and downs and the length of time transcriptions take! I have built up my self-confidence and have developed a good reputation in the department. I was approached by the Aim Higher office to help them out for two weeks (paid) on a project about black and minority ethnic students' experiences of higher education. I hope further paid work will come up in the future.

I enjoy thinking sociologically and always critically analyse any social situation I am in. I turned my previous job as a sales assistant into an opportunity to really get to understand the sociology of retail work. For my MA dissertation I used an ethnographic research methodology to investigate how the social order is maintained, negotiated and resisted by my colleagues and I on the menswear department using Gramsci's theory of hegemony. I am 26 and I never have any doubt that I am a sociologist for life whether I'm unemployed, work in a shop, become a stay at home parent or become a professor.

Terence Chivers

Dr Terence Chivers E-Mail: terence.chivers@ntlworld.com



Soon after retiring in 1991, I began helping out on a basic education course at a nearby technical college. The principal activity was providing English to people from a number of other countries. I qualified as a teacher in this work after a year. But I was still looking for a chance to teach sociology. By this time, I had found the University of the Third Age (U3A as we call it) which offers a range of different subjects to retired people [website: u3a.org.uk]. The subjects offered vary according to whatever local members are able or are prepared to offer. U3A carries the term 'university' in its title due to its origins in the French university system. In Britain, it is developed as a self-funded and self-administered organisation operating in urban and rural communities across the country. Each U3A is grass roots organised and largely autonomous within a loose national constitution.

In 1992 I founded a U3A in my home-town since one was lacking. We began offering study groups in a range of subjects in January of the following year; one of these subjects was sociology. Every year, it has been offered in some form. Particularly attractive has been the opportunity to offer it in my own way to a group of participants whose interest has provided so much by way of discussion. Because I found the interaction absorbing, I soon branched out into other subjects. Particularly important was life story writing, to which older people bring a lifetime of experience. Since I needed a firmer grasp of the subject, I took a certificate and then a second doctorate in the topic at a nearby university.

Some years ago, I attended a U3A national conference, which annually brings together a few members from each of the 500-600 local U3As. The international organisation operates biennial congresses. Along with a group of others I attended the one in China in 2004 and shall be attending the one in the French city of Rheims in 2006. I shall be giving a paper on my research, which is a study of my own U3A with particular regard to members' reflective learning. The chance to explore research interests is particularly useful at these international gatherings.

In recent years, U3A has sought to cater for the fourth age - a time when physical weakness limits the movement of the house-bound, whose minds may nonetheless be active. This kind of online activity, developing research and the capacity to provide low-cost learning is likely to keep all of us who wish to participate busy for the foreseeable future.

Events review

Another feature we hope to include regularly in *Sociology for All?* is the 'Events Review'. We hope this section will enable you to share your views about sociological events you have attended, in addition to raising awareness of the existence of organisations and activities which other members 'outside academia' may be interested in. If you have attended, or are about to attend, a sociological event of any type and would like to write a short review or simply express your reaction or thoughts to the issues that arose from it, please contact Julie.

This issue, one SOAg member shares with us her experience of attending a multi-disciplinary meeting at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis which involved sociologists both inside and outside academia:

CASA Meeting

By Isis Sanchez Estelles

The CASA (The Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis) ¹meeting is an opportunity for all sociologists to meet people from other disciplines. It is also a chance to have a dialogue between people inside and outside academia and its limits. This year the topic of the meeting was 'Constructing social change', which means how we can construct together change by different angles and perspectives. In this sense, the meeting was divided in four topics: art, direct action, knowledge and utopia and desires.

The question was how to construct a model of change by a dialogue of these four main approaches and with people from different backgrounds. The methodology of this meeting was different from the normal lectures or conferences. In this kind of workshop the first aim is that the audience participate, involve and create in the process of the workshop; for instance: working in groups to solve a problem, the creation of games, the participation in an exhibition, or discussions about films.

In the case of *art*, there were interesting interventions such as ' Portable exhibition spaces as a tactic for public intervention'. In this session there were important contributions for sociology. There were discussions about the positive and problematic ways that portable gallery projects constitute the viewing public. This includes the way in which they present the disparities between intellectual contemporary art culture and various other cultures, in terms of a meeting between people, and not a relationship between the viewer and an institution. Also there were sessions, where the question was raised whether contemporary art exhibitions can inspire social change by inviting audiences to think in creative and critical ways.

¹ This year has been held in Amsterdam at the end of July as the two previous years, but the next years are going to be held in different places.

Exhibitions can communicate the structures of power and reveal alternatives; exhibitions can encourage people to become more active in their personal and community lives.

In the case of *direct action*, there were interesting approaches such as investigating the role of theory in direct action. There were debated interesting questions such as: What happens when we aim to activate theory in direct action situations? How do the strains and obstacles of protests and demonstrations impede, redirect and influence ideas about action? How do we act quickly and responsibly with the consent of our collectives or affinity groups?

In the sphere of *knowledge* the question was raised: *Critical research: Within or outside academia?* The workshop focuses on the possibilities of doing research that produces results for 'bottom-up' social transformation. In this workshop it was explained how recent neo-liberal reforms and ongoing re-structuration of academia have changed the preconditions for conducting critical research. The strategy was also shown of 'mapping' in social movements research. It is a tool with which, by producing pictures and schematic information, researchers produce critical information in an accessible form. Furthermore, it was discussed how people who are fed up with research in the academy can produce some knowledge which can be useful for 'ordinary' people.

This topic of knowledge was the most productive one, as there were some other interesting projects such as *The Multi-critical faculty* where the role of minority groups such as Muslims should be considered as important as the majority of people. The Multi-critical faculty wants to establish an open space in European higher education where it will be possible to develop new processes of thought in which society can be viewed in a pro-active way. Within the multi-critical faculty project there is a place for different rationalities with different social, cultural and religious backgrounds. It is the question of how to include different people with different backgrounds in the process of learning.

In the case of *utopia*, there were also discussions about the World Social Forum, and the social movements create and put into practice the utopia. Also there were forums where it was discussed how dystopia counteracts utopia. The question was how can utopia and dystopia function simultaneously and how does this spectre haunt the memory of the 50 years of communism in Romania? Relevant insights were shown into the history of Romanian Communism, including examples of media propaganda and facts that build up the objective conditions. At the end of the meeting, there was an encounter with all the participants to dialogue the four main streams in order to construct social change. In a few words, the CASA meeting is an excuse for sociologists to think critically how to construct social change with others. Maybe the next time in London!

Isis Sanchez Estelles graduated with a BA in Sociology from Madrid Complutense University and is currently an MA student of Ideology and Discourse Analysis based at the University of Essex.

Resources

Audio lectures

The **British Academy** holds a library of audio recordings of lectures that have taken place at the Academy dating back to December 2003. These can be accessed on the British Academy Lectures Online page (<http://britac.studyserve.com/home/default.asp>) and are available free of charge until such a time that lecture texts are published. SOAg members may be interested to hear the audio recording of the lecture “**Who’s Creating Knowledge? The Challenge of Non-University Researchers**” that took place at the British Academy on 27th June 2006 and is available on: <http://britac.studyserve.com/home/Lecture.asp?ContentContainerID=116>

Thank you to both Stefan Bertschi and Dr Keith Kahn-Harris for informing ‘Sociology for All?’ of these details.

Social Theory learning and teaching resources

SOAg member Dave Harris has advised ‘Sociology for All?’ of a website on which he, his colleagues and associates hold a range of sociological learning and teaching resources which are accessible to all. These can be found on: <http://www.arasite.org/>. Dave Harris is a teacher of Sociology at the College of St.Mark & St.John.

Contributions to future issues

If you wish to contribute an autobiography, review article, information on resources, or any other item that you think might be of interest to SOAg members, please contact us here at ‘Sociology for All?’ using one of the addresses below. We will be very pleased to hear from you.

Please do not hesitate to let us know your suggestions for any other types of feature that you would like to see in future editions of the newsletter, or if you have any issues that you would like raised with the BSA Executive Committee.

Contact details

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Or write to: Lynda Nicholson, Research Student (PhD),
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If you are not currently a member and wish join us, please e-mail Julie at the address left. We also welcome your suggestions on:

- How you would like to see the group go forward.
- What the BSA could do to reflect your interests and support you.