

# Magdalena Bergmann

---

## Conflict and Civil Society: 7th Congress of the European Sociological Association, 3–6 September 2007, Glasgow

---

Kultura i Edukacja nr 5, 136-139

---

2008

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach  
dozwolonego użytku.

# SPECIAL COMMUNICATES



*Magdalena Bergmann*

## **CONFLICT AND CIVIL SOCIETY: 7<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 3–6 SEPTEMBER 2007, GLASGOW**

---

Two years have passed since organising the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the European Sociological Association (ESA) in Toruń, the city Glasgow has become the host of the eight event edition – Glasgow, the greatest metropolis and the leading academic centre in Scotland. More than 1600 delegates gathered at the congress which was organised in the period 3–6 September 2007, delegates who came to the congress from 51 European and world countries. The members took part in a conference, one which lasted four days in extensive camps of two Glasgow's universities – the Caledonian University and the University of Strathclyde – as well as in plenary sessions, half-plenary sessions and research network meetings. They represented several sub-disciplines of the contemporary sociology, displaying its vast and various spectrum of theoretical, methodological and empirical interests.

The ESA congresses, being the most momentous events in the European sociological environment life, have always distinguished themselves with titles that referred to the key difficulties they are dedicated to. The leading issues of the ESA Congress in Glasgow were associated with conflict and civil society. As the present ESA chairwoman, Giovanna Procacci, a professor of the University in Milan, marked in her welcome letter to the congress members, the conflict still remains one of the key issues organising the sociological reflection on the society in Europe. Breaking the traditional socio-economical frames, where the conflict was situated in by Karol Marks, the conflict in today's Europe and its societies started to focus on other factors, such as, age, sex, ethnics and religion, vocational status or even migrations. It influences, at the same time, the citizenship, one which is understood

not only as a kind of belonging to the country institution, but as a sense of feeling at home, integrating and being a member of a society. Similar issues were included by Donatella della Porta, the professor of the University in Florence, in the plenary lecture inaugurating congress. She highlighted also the fact of the changing character of the social conflicts' actors (global social movement), and the battle language of civil rights (a language referring, to a greater extent, to 'softly' understood identity of units and groups, rather than 'concrete' rights in their formal meaning).

The questions of the conflict and its connection with the civil society condition, though leading for the congress and including several topic sections, did not dominate the whole event. As it has already been mentioned, European sociology was present in various issues at the congress in Glasgow. The topic sessions of fifty research networks representing, so-called, detailed sociologies of: work, education, culture, health, youth, sport, and other spheres of social life, became the main arena of the congress. In each of the sessions, ones which were held simultaneously in various congress premises, there were presented from 20 to 30 projects – which means that the great majority of more than 1600 congress participants were not only the spectators, but also the lecturers. The speeches were mainly of the report character, a report of their own research work or the existing analysis of the empirical material with its roots in, e.g., international comparative research work. One can find several of this type of projects in the topic networks, ones dedicated to the family sociology, sex questions on the market, or even to the social politics, proving, in that very way, the existence and dynamic development of the European research space in the social sciences. The speeches concerning the analysis of various social issues in Russia, Belarus, Turkey or Balkan countries – countries often situated on the margin of the European discussion, were of the greatest interest, or even they occurred to move the participants deeply.

The activity of the topic research network, one abound with more than thousand speeches, makes one think also in the critical way about some aspects of the congress. One could clearly notice, as for the presented speeches, the sometimes troublesome inter-disciplinary – both in the backstage, and during the debates of several lecturers, one could also find problems with the choice of the topic group where one had to send the project summary because some of them could match at least a few areas. A few Scandinavian sociologists were accompanied by the mentioned dilemma; they dedicated their papers to searching the connections between some Christian fraction and the variety of social politics models in Europe, which could be interesting for religion sociologists, as well as the social politicians. The given fact proves that the sociology sub-disciplines are associated with

one another as tightly as interesting for the sociologists social reality elements – however, on the other hand, it does seem to weaken the identity of the explored questions by the researches. Some of the speeches were dedicated to such detailed problems, formulated in an arbitrary way, being the reasons rather than the research issues, that the participating sociologists had doubts as for the legitimacy of their presentation at the general European forum. The congress participants could not stop asking after the common presentation of two researches of the mentioned countries: “Why the fashion designers, why their family lives, why the example of Germany and Portugal?”, the researches, who presented the results of their comparative research on the family life of fashion sector managers, could not explain why they were interested in the detailed problems. Certainly the positive signal associated with the topic research network functioning is the process of their development and active operation not only during congresses, but also in the two years long periods between them. Members of several networks keep research contacts with one another, organise common seminars and conferences, make research project partnerships, which proves, without any doubt, integrating and network creating potential of European Sociological Association congresses.

The traditional scientific sessions, filled with lectures and projects were not the only aspects of the programme formula of the 7<sup>th</sup> ESA Congress. One could also attend meetings with the authors of the most interesting academic works within the sociology scope issued within the last years. The works were presented by Jeffrey C. Alexander, one who is thought to be a neo-functionalism classic, and Janusz Mucha, one associated for several years with sociology in Toruń, an appreciated specialist in the sociology and anthropology of ethnic relations on the international arena. It seems that the panel discussion entitled “What happens with sociology graduates in Europe?”, where the lecturers draw the picture of the encountered opportunities and barriers of the young generation of sociologists on the work market and scientific career, became also an attractive initiative. The vital part of the 7<sup>th</sup> European Sociological Association Congress was the scientific training for postgraduates dedicated to the questions of the conflict and civil society, a training which started three days before the official inauguration. During the training the young researchers participated in the classes of the leading representatives of the European sociology, presented and discussed the topic concepts of their doctor’s papers or some results of their research works. What should also be mentioned is the fact that the training is an initiative, one which was started in September 2005 in Toruń during 7<sup>th</sup> ESA Congress, which aims at encouraging the young researchers’ generation to taking active part in the European sociological environment life.

The congress ended with a general meeting of ESA members, where the key issues concerning the organization function and development were discussed, and the leadership and the board for two years long cadence 2007–2009 were chosen. Giovanna Procacci, so far the present chairwoman of the European Sociological Association, was replaced with Claire Wallace, professor of the University in Aberdeen, who co-created the Middle-European University several years ago. One should not forget the success of the re-elected to the board Monika Kwiecińska-Zdrenka from the UMK Sociology Institute. During the general meeting one got to know – which seems to be a tradition of any congress – the place and hosts of the next event edition, that is, Lisbon and its university with the Science Institute of Work and Employment, which is going to be held in 2009. The leading idea of the ninth sociologists meeting, sociologists from the whole continent, seems to be the dispute on whether there is one society or several European societies. Observing the controversy associated with the next formula of the European Union, dynamics of such notions as employment migrations, social echo of the world economic crisis, globalization of culture patterns, but on the other hand, also, e.g. separatist and regional tendencies on the map of Europe, one may come to the conclusion that the questions of the next ESA congress are going to be very attractive to the social researches of the Old Continent.