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DATE: July 23rd and 26th, 1998

FROM: Stella R. Quah
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Chairman of Research Coordinating Committee, and
Chairman of the Research Council

TO: ISA Executive Committee, Research Coordinating Committee
and ISA Research Council

SUBJECT: *1994-1998 Report from the Vice-President (Research)*

Dear ISA colleagues:

It has been a privilege and honor to have worked with you on the research activities of ISA during the past four years. The research activities of ISA as a non-profit professional organization are unique in one respect: the absence of financial support. Consequently, the work accomplished by my office during the past four years could not have been possible without the generous and active collaboration of the overwhelming majority of Presidents and delegates of the ISA Research Committees, Working Groups and Thematic Groups (all of whom will be hereafter referred to as Committee leaders), and of my colleagues who are members of the Research Coordinating Committee (RCC).

What has been accomplished during the past four years? The management decisions on ISA research affairs took place at the Research Council meetings of 1996 and 1997, and the RCC and Executive Committee meetings from 1994 to 1997 where specific ideas were discussed and implemented (for example, the setting up of the Research Council Nominating Committee in 1997 and two initiatives approved by the RCC and the Executive Committee in November 1996: the use of Newsletter grants to increase ISA membership; and the discussion of a code of ethics for ISA). In addition to this regular work, I am pleased to report that the five objectives I set up at the beginning of my term have been achieved, four of them fully and the fifth one will be completed soon. I shall report on these five objectives and will outline some suggestions for the next generation of ISA leaders.

Objectives Achieved

The five objectives I pursued as Vice-President for Research and Chair of the Research Council were: (1) to maintain direct communication with the leaders; (2) to promote the dissemination of sociological knowledge across continents through the Abstracts Project;



(3) to encourage and increase contact among Research Committees' leaders; (4) to assist ~~Committee leaders in improving the management of their committees~~ ^{Committee leaders in improving the management of their committees}; and (5) to bring together the best talent from each Research Committee in a book on the advances and challenges of the different fields of sociology at the end of the 20th century.

(1) *Direct communication*

It is customary for ISA Executives to communicate with their constituencies primarily or exclusively through the ISA Secretariat. However, I know that Committee leaders want the ISA Executives to be more approachable and be informed of the developments taking place at the Research Committee level. Consequently, I have maintained direct communication with Committee leaders whenever possible through electronic mail, fax and in cases when these two means were not possible, long distance telephone calls and airmail. In my direct communication with Committee leaders I have kept the Executive Secretary, the RCC and the appropriate Executive members of ISA informed. The current advances in technology have greatly facilitated my effort and the feedback I received from Committee leaders is very positive. One drawback of this effort has been, of course, the additional cost incurred. Every year my expenditure has exceeded by more than fifty percent the amount of the stipend received from ISA as VP(Research). I have paid the difference from my own funds.

As part of this effort in direct communication, I requested Committee leaders to include my name in the mailing lists of their Newsletters. Reading the newsletters from RCs/WGs/TGs has been one of the ways of keeping myself informed of the activities of the ISA membership at large and the efforts of Committee leaders.

(2) *The Abstracts Project*

The Abstracts Project aimed at disseminating through *Sociological Abstracts* (SA) published sociological work not indexed in major sociological databases such as SA and the *Social Science Citation Index* (SSCI) and thus not readily accessible to the international community of sociologists. I proposed the Abstracts Project to the RCC and the Executive Committee and it was approved on 25 March 1995. On 10 April 1995 I wrote to Miriam Chall, Executive Director of SA, explaining the Abstracts Project and inviting her to collaborate. She replied on 24 April 1995 agreeing to participate. Over the next three months Miriam and I worked out the details and agreed on the schedule of two initial rounds of abstracts to be submitted to SA on January and July 1996 respectively. On 24 July 1995 I wrote to all Presidents of Research Committees, introducing the Abstracts Project and inviting them to participate.

The Abstracts Project was implemented in two phases. In the first phase I invited the leaders of each Committee to follow four steps: (a) to identify one to three local or regional journals the Research Committee's field of expertise that were not yet included in the databases of SA or SSCI and should preferably be published in languages other than English, French or German; (b) to select from the identified journals one to three articles that, in their considered opinion, were of professional interest to the international

community of sociologists and that were published not earlier than the preceding nine months to meet SA's requirements; (c) to prepare an English language abstract of the selected articles in the standard format stipulated by SA using the SA Abstracting form which I provided; and (d) to submit to me the abstract forms and copies of the respective articles in their original language.

The first phase involved 23 English abstracts of sociological journal articles originally published in Mandarin, Japanese, Thai, Arab, Croatian and Finnish journals. This phase was completed on schedule thanks to the competent collaboration of RC/WG/TG Presidents, Secretaries, authors, and three distinguished scholars from Taiwan (Prof. C.C. Yi), Thailand (Prof. S. Sermsri) and Japan (Prof. F. Kumagai) whom I invited to identify deserving sociological publications in their respective languages. The second phase of the project commenced in 1996 with my invitation to all Committee leaders and all members of ISA to begin submitting abstracts directly to SA following the same basic guidelines of the first phase. This invitation was first published in the ISA Bulletin 69-70 (Spring-Summer 1996, page 7) and it remains in effect.

(3) *Encouraging contact among Committee Leaders*

Two main methods were used to promote contact among Committee leaders namely, electronic conferencing and electronic mail. I tested and found the use of Internet very useful and inexpensive for 'real time' communication among ISA members particularly among small groups such as Steering Boards of RCs/WGs/TGs, and the RCC. This experience was shared with the leaders of all committees. Similarly, the use of electronic mail proved extremely useful in gathering and conveying views among Committee leaders and the ISA Executive Committee.

(a) *Electronic conference*

I organized the 1996 Research Council meeting as an electronic conference using the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) technology and electronic mail. The experience was rather valuable for those involved. I included the Presidents and Secretaries of RCs/WGs/TGs in the preparation process thus promoting the use of electronic mail. The following is a succinct description of the steps taken which may be useful to others wishing to set up an electronic conference using IRC:

(i) Announcement of the conference.

On 28 March 1996 I wrote to all Committee leaders proposing the electronic meeting of the Research Council and providing the basic information on the proposed date, time and length of the conference as well as on the requirements, including a brief introduction to IRC. The response to my proposal was enthusiastic. I proceeded to formalize the arrangement working with a system analyst expert in IRC as my consultant for this project.

(ii) Distribution of the IRC software and guidelines

On 6 April 1996 I sent the first of six e-mail Updates announcing the free distribution of the IRC software as an e-mail attachment to Committee leaders who were not familiar with IRC, and providing details on how the delegates should "sign in" to participate in the electronic conference. I gave these details

one month in advance to encourage delegates to practice using IRC before the actual electronic meeting. The practice period was effective in highlighting difficulties and allowed us to find solutions and to familiarize Committee leaders with the new communication system.

(iii) Distribution of meeting agenda, background documents and proposed schedule

I requested the Executive Secretary to send to all delegates the set of background documents for the meeting by air mail and on 17 April 1996 I sent them the next Update with the meeting agenda and two schedule options. The setting of the meeting schedule is a particularly important but difficult step in the organization of international electronic meetings because of the time difference across time zones. As the delegates were located in six different time zones, I proposed two possible schedules. I also set up a “test chat” for 7 May 1996 at 10:30 GMT to prepare all participants and to test our arrangements in Singapore.

(iv) Final Instructions

During the period from 17 April to 14 May 1996 I communicated regularly and frequently through e-mail with delegates providing individual assistance and answering their queries. During this period I sent three more Updates to all delegates informing them on the majority’s chosen schedule; instructing them on the precise manner of connecting with our IRC server in Singapore and of ‘registering’ for the meeting; and giving them the basic talk guidelines for our meeting.

Following the schedule chosen by the majority of delegates, the first ISA Research Council electronic meeting began on May 14th, 1996 at 22:30 GMT. The meeting lasted three hours and involved ten participants, eight of them delegates and two observers. Delegates from 38 of the 50 Research Committees had agreed to participate but 30 of them encountered various difficulties in setting up their own computer systems on the day of the meeting and were disappointed that they could not join us.

The detailed minutes of our meeting were produced immediately (this is one of the key features of the IRC system). On 16 May 1996 I distributed the complete Minutes by e-mail to all the Research Council delegates and to the Research Committee Presidents who did not participate (four of them did not have e-mail and the minutes were sent to them by fax through the ISA Secretariat).

(b) *Electronic mail*

Besides using electronic mail regularly in a one-to-one communication with Committee leaders, and members of the RCC and Executive Committee, e-mail has also been extremely useful in the accurate gathering and conveying of opinions of Committee leaders. Three specific examples will suffice.

- (i) As there was no quorum at the IRC meeting, I complemented it with an e-mail forum to round out the 1996 Research Council meeting (i.e., dealing with pending matters by electronic mail circulation). I requested all delegates to refer to the Minutes and background documents distributed earlier and to send me by e-mail their views and positions on each item of the meeting Agenda. The

topic of most discussion and interest among delegates was the preparations for the 14th World Congress.

- (ii) As a follow-up of (i), on 31 August 1996 I requested all Committee leaders to send me their views and suggestions by e-mail on the preparations of sessions and papers for the 14th World Congress. Leaders of 32 Research Committees sent me their views. I prepared a file with their verbatim responses to my five questions and submitted the printed file to the Executive Committee meeting held in Colima in November 1996. I had sent earlier to the Program Committee a file with the 21 replies I had received up to that time for their September 1996 meeting in Brussels.
- (iii) In October 1996 I requested all Presidents of Research Committees to express their views on two other important matters that needed discussion: the selection criteria for allocation of Newsletter Grants, and upgrading applications received by the ISA Secretariat. I submitted to the Executive Committee meeting in Colima in November 1996, a second printed file with the verbatim responses from 21 Presidents who had replied. Their views were taken into consideration as well at the Colima meeting of the Research Coordinating Committee.

(4) *Improvements in the management of Research Committees*

The management of Research Committees involves two aspects: the internal administration of the Research Committee's affairs by its President and Secretary with the active collaboration of its Steering Board; and the relationship between the ISA Executive and Secretariat on the one hand, and the Committee leaders on the other. My colleagues at the Research Coordinating Committee and I addressed this dual concern using a three-pronged approach: the setting up of Guidelines, the preparation of a Booklet, and the first Training Session for Research Committee Leaders to be held at this 14th World Congress.

(a) *The Guidelines*

In November 1996 I appointed an *ad hoc* subcommittee under the chairmanship of Jennifer Platt with the task of preparing a draft of guidelines for Presidents and Secretaries of Research Committees. We discussed and fine-tuned the draft during the first half of 1997. I then presented the proposed Guidelines to the Research Council at its meeting on 6 August 1997 in Montreal. The Research Council discussed it in detail and approved it with some modifications. The approved Guidelines will be distributed to Presidents of Research Committees [see point (c) below] and copies are available from the Secretariat. The Guidelines are, of course, subject to modification as circumstances change and as ISA develops. Some minor refinements were offered at the Tokyo meeting in November 1997. Views and suggestions are encouraged for future Research Councils to discuss and refine them further, if necessary.

(b) *Booklet of Instructions for Presidents of Committees*

My colleagues at the RCC and I decided to prepare a Booklet of Instructions as an additional instrument to assist leaders of ISA committees in their tasks. Jennifer Platt prepared the first draft which was then discussed and refined in a collective effort by Jennifer Platt, Izabela Barlinska and I. The Booklet will be distributed to Presidents of Research Committees [see point (c) below] and copies are available from the Secretariat.

(c) *Training Session for Committee Leaders*

My colleagues and I at the RCC will provide this first Training Session at the 14th World Congress and we hope this session will become a feature in every World Congress. The Training Session will be held on Friday, 31 July 1998, from 4:30 to 6:30 pm at the Palais des Congress. All Committee leaders have been invited. The planning of the Training Session has been yet another task that we have accomplished through electronic mail. The Session will have presentations by all except one of the members of the RCC on the following topics: The role of Research Committees within ISA --S. Quah; Finances and Legal Aspects of Research Committees --V. Ferrari; Production and other aspects of the Research Committee's Newsletter --J. Platt; Managing Research Committee Data --A. Sales; Managing Multilingual Membership --J.M. Fritz; Striving for Geographical Diversity --J. Gonzalez; Preparing for the next World Congress --C. Inglis; Publications of Research Committee Work --P. Sztompka.

(5) *The Book Project "Advances in International Sociology"*

My plan to bring together the talent of Committee leaders into a book on the development of sociology was implemented in conjunction with the 1997 Meeting of the Research Council. The relevant details are as follows:

At the Colima meeting of the Executive Committee in November 1996, I invited Professor Arnaud Sales to work with me on this project which involved a conference to present and discuss drafts of chapters for a book and the subsequent editing of the book on the development of Sociology at the end of the 20th century. I described for him my plan to hold the conference in conjunction with the 1997 Business Meeting of the Research Council. Professor Sales accepted my invitation readily and obtained financial support from his academic institution, the University of Montreal for the Research Council Meeting and Conference. I would like to take this opportunity to record once again my profound gratitude to Professor Sales for his enthusiastic and invaluable cooperation in the planning and implementation of the conference and book project. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation for the financial support received from the University of Montreal (including the provision of the conference venue and facilities and the hosting the ISA Executives) and for the gracious hospitality we received from Professor Arnaud Sales, Monsieur Rene Simard, Recteur of the University of Montreal, and Professor Nicole Laurin, Head of the Department of Sociology of the University of Montreal; and Prof. Gilles Pronovost, Chairman of the Local Arrangements Committee for the World Congress, who kindly organized a very informative visit to the World Congress venues and facilities. The 1997 Research Council meeting and conference would not have been possible without their financial support and hospitality.

The Research Council Business Meeting and Conference took place on August 6 and 7, 1997 at the University of Montreal. Twenty-nine delegates and seven observers and ex-officio members attended the Business Meeting. The matters discussed at the Business Meeting were: the Chairperson's Report on Overview of Research Council's developments; Discussion of the *ad hoc* committee's recommendations on performance evaluation of Research Committees and approval of the Guidelines; introduction of the Research Council Nominating Committee; development of the book project; the ISA Code of Ethics initiative; and matters concerning the World Congress of Sociology for 1998 and 2002.

The Research Council Conference (organized, as indicated above, by Prof. Sales and I under the auspices of the Department of Sociology of the University of Montreal) followed

immediately after the Research Council Business Meeting. Twenty-five chapter drafts for the book project were presented and discussed at the nine workshops and two plenary sessions of the Conference.

Following the Conference, Arnaud Sales and I proceeded with the subsequent phase of the book project: (a) we invited renowned scholars to serve as reviewers of each paper (two reviewers per chapter) as part of a double-blind peer review procedure to select the papers to be included in the book; (b) we collected the anonymous reviews and forwarded them to the respective authors with guidelines on the preparation of the revised version; (c) we are now receiving the revised chapters. Eighteen of the 24 chapters have been revised and submitted by the authors up to today. The remaining contributors are currently finalizing their revisions. The original plan was to have the complete manuscript ready by July 1998 but the process of peer review took longer than expected.

We gratefully acknowledge the spirit of scholarship and dedication of all chapter authors and reviewers of the book project *Advances in International Sociology*. Renowned scholars accepted generously to evaluate the papers despite their busy schedules and without any financial reward. Similarly, all authors invested their time and expertise in preparing and later revising their papers without any financial support. Considering that this Research Council book project has received no financial support whatsoever from either ISA or any other source up to now, the book represents not only the expertise of the Committee leaders and authors involved but also their true scholarly dedication to the discipline of sociology.

On the matter of publishers, I am very pleased to report that at its meeting on 23 July 1998, the ISA Publications Committee accepted unanimously the suggestion of the Research Coordinating Committee (RCC) to support the publication of the book. Following the mandate of the RCC, I presented its motion of support to the ISA Executive Committee meeting on 24 July 1998 which requested that ISA and its Publications Committee to put this book in the priority list of ISA publications for the next term. The Executive Committee approved the motion unanimously. As arranged with the representative of Sage on 23 July 98, we will submit the complete manuscript by mid August 1998.

Summary of Suggestions for the Next Group of ISA Leaders

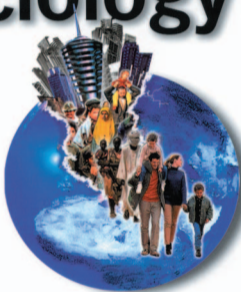
- (1) Electronic mail, WEB pages and electronic conferencing should be promoted further. The latter works best for small groups of up to 10 persons and thus is very suitable for meetings of Steering Boards and subcommittees.
- (2) The Guidelines for Committee leaders approved by the 1994-98 Research Council and the Booklet prepared by the 1994-98 RCC (to be distributed at the Training Session on 31 July 98), require periodic updating to keep them relevant and should be systematically distributed to all new Committee leaders by the ISA Secretariat.
- (3) Strong support should be given to the sub-committee preparing the ISA Code of Ethics. The entire ISA membership must be encouraged to give their feedback to the draft code.
- (4) I strongly recommend a closer collaboration among the President and the four Vice-Presidents. Their tasks would be greatly facilitated if there is collegial cooperation among them.


Stella Quah

Vice-President (Research), 1994-98

The International Handbook of

Sociology



edited by
Stella R. Quah and Arnaud Sales

SAGE

**The
International Handbook
of Sociology**

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Foreword

Alberto Martinelli

This book is the first attempt in years to provide a balanced and well-informed assessment of the state of the art of sociology in many of its most important specialized fields. A first, distinctive character of the volume is the choice to focus on specialized fields instead of general theories. It is a wise choice since, while the leading theorists are well known in the profession as a whole, the bulk of the sociological community is made of specialists who, although less widely known, often have a greater impact on the public discourse, on education, and on policy-oriented decision making. A second, related, distinctive character is that the 23 chapters are written by experts in the respective fields who are also leaders of research committees of the International Sociological Association (ISA), with two positive consequences which we do not find in most handbooks of sociology: the book guarantees a more international coverage of the various fields (although sociologists from the non-Western world are still under-represented) and it provides a comprehensive review of the contributions to each specialized field by scholars belonging to different competitive schools. As President of the International Sociological Association, I am glad to add that this book also shows ISA's vitality and its growing importance and legitimation in the world sociological community.

The picture of sociology at the dawn of the 21st century which emerges from the volume is a picture of continuities and breakthroughs in research findings, cooperation and conflict among competing paradigms, achievements in theory and method, and unresolved problems. Major continuities are the ongoing concern with a core of perennial questions of inquiry, such as social order, conflict and change, the meanings of social action, power and legitimacy, inequality and social reproduction, and the reinterpretation of the classics, such as Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, Pareto among others, as sources of theoretical inspiration, although with the awareness that their analyses are historically bounded.

The common heritage — made of continuing research questions and influences of the classics — did not amount, however, to a core, widely shared, disciplinary paradigm. Actually, the multiplicity of paradigms and theoretical approaches clearly appears as a basic distinctive character of contemporary sociology. For most

sociologists this is perceived as an advantage. Antony Giddens remarks that “the fact that there is no single theoretical approach which dominates the whole of sociology” demonstrates that “the jostling of rival theoretical approaches and theories is an expression of the vitality of the sociological enterprise”. And Raymond Boudon argues that “sociology is in crisis when it pretends to have reached the conditions of a ‘normal science’ and to be led by a unique paradigm”. Not all sociologists are indeed convinced of this advantage, given the fact that some of them prefer to turn to the rational action paradigm of economics; but most seem persuaded that the subject matter of sociology requires a plurality of conceptual perspectives and methods of investigation and that alternative theoretical approaches can be tested with regard to the analysis of specific phenomena.

I think that the advantages and disadvantages of having a core paradigm for a discipline tend to balance each other. The case of economics is illuminating in this respect. In economics alternative approaches do exist, but they do not challenge the core paradigm, which is based on the combined assumptions of rational maximizing behavior, market equilibrium, and stable preferences. This ‘creative simplification’ of human action has brought undeniable theoretical achievements, which are exemplified in Leon Walras’ general equilibrium model as a response to the question of the efficient functioning of a market economy made of millions of individual decisions. But it has also fostered limitations in the number and type of hypotheses which can be derived from the paradigm, as well as apories and difficulties in the empirical validation of the theoretical hypotheses; and it has constrained the ‘imagination’ of scholars in providing interpretations of emerging economic processes.

The reverse seems true for sociology: the freedom from paradigmatic ‘dogma’ has been paid at the cost of more precarious accumulation of knowledge, greater ambivalence, bitter paradigmatic fights which often amount to a waste of intellectual energies. And it has prevented widely accepted solutions to central theoretical questions. A similar question to that of the economists’ relation between rational individual actors and general market equilibrium is at the heart of the sociological inquiry: it is the question of the relationship between structure and agency, with the strictly related ones of the micro-macro links, and of the relation between causal and interpretative methodologies. But there is no theoretical solution to these questions, which could parallel Walras’ general equilibrium model. The preference which most sociologists seem to share for multiple paradigms could, then, be as well a ‘forced preference’, since major attempts to provide a unifying paradigm, from Talcott Parsons to James Coleman to Anthony Giddens, have not lasted or have not been accepted by the majority of scholars. Failures may be due to the fact that the features of ‘homo sociologicus’ are different from those of ‘homo economicus’, and do not allow the creative simplification of the iper-rationalist assumption, or to the fact that core theoretical questions have to be rephrased and/or most adequate responses must be worked out.

In this situation, however, most sociologists working in specialized fields have not been ‘paralyzed’ by the absence of a unified grand theory, but have proceeded along the most viable paths of Robert Merton’s “middle-range theories”, Arthur Stinchcombe’s “toolkit of analytical instruments” and Jon Elster’s concept of

“mechanisms”. As the latter author argues, “there should be a shift in emphasis in social sciences from theories to mechanisms”, i.e. “small and medium-sized descriptions of ways in which things happen. A mechanism is a little causal story, recognizable from one context to another. A theory has greater pretensions: it is supposed to tell you which mechanisms operate in which situation... Generalizations should take the form of mechanisms, not theories”. This approach, which is close to Weber’s and Simmel’s attitude toward sociology, seems particularly valid for sociological research in specialized areas. In fact, in these situations, the analyst-interpreter will extract from the toolkit those tools, models, mechanisms, that he considers relevant, will adapt them to the concrete research questions, and will verify the correspondence on the basis of the available data and methods.

The continuing work of many sociologists along those lines in specialized fields, as this volume shows, explains why the difficulties in general theory construction have not prevented significant sociological advances in recent years; advances which can be summarized in: methodological advances, better knowledge in specialized fields, and greater consensus of most sociologists on the basic tensions of their work.

Knowledge achievements in specialized fields are well documented in the 23 chapters (and they could be equally easily shown in those areas which are not covered in the volume, such as those of economic sociology), and they are related to the reasonable adoption of the toolkit approach I have discussed.

Methodological advances are also effectively shown in several chapters. They are related to the development of the computer, and range from improved multivariate analysis to graph theory and network analysis, from more extensive comparative research to more rigorous methods of recording and analyzing micro interactional data. Besides, as Smelser points out in a recent work, there is a significant convergence in sociological methodology in the trend toward multi-method analysis with a loss of importance of the qualitative-quantitative contrast and a growing acknowledgment of the bounded applicability of a given methodology.

Positive changes have also taken place in the mode of sociological debate, which have improved from that of destructive attacks aiming at annihilating rivals to constructive critical analysis, with some attempts to bridge contending paradigms and building larger theoretical syntheses. Finally, a growing consensus has developed among most sociologists about the basic tensions of our work, such as the necessary linkage between theory and method and between understanding and explanation.

And there is a growing awareness of both the tension between the universal and the particular, and the tension between involvement and disengagement. In this last respect, sociologists seem increasingly aware of the need to try to combine the search for universality with the respect for specific identities, cultures and languages, and to avoid that legitimate specific cultural and political commitments of individual sociologists prevent a more important and general commitment of the sociological community to collectively validated truth and to knowledge-based public discourse.

Alberto Martinelli
President
International Sociological Association

Preface

The idea for this Handbook took concrete shape in our conversations in late November 1996 in Colima, Mexico, where both of us were attending a meeting of the International Sociological Association (ISA) Executive Committee. We felt that it was important for the ISA Research Council to continue the scholarly task of taking stock of the progress in sociology at important cross-roads in its development.

The previous review of developments by ISA was conducted in 1980 under the leadership of Magdalena Sokolowska who organized a conference of the ISA Research Council in the Chateau de Jablonna near Warsaw with the theme "Sociology: The State of the Art". Coincidentally, the dates of that meeting turned out to be of historical significance. It took place on 26–29 August 1980, at the time of the famous Gdansk strike that gave birth to the Solidarność movement. The outcome of that conference was the book by the same title edited by Tom Bottomore, Stefan Novak and Magdalena Sokolowska and published in 1982. Its chapters reviewed the existing conceptual and methodological trends in the discipline in some of the fields of specialization represented by the ISA Research Committees. Those chapters also reflected the social and intellectual agitation of the 1960s and 1970s. Two decades later as we enter the year 2000, we are at a new cross-roads and it is time once again to assess the development of our discipline.

This book represents the collaborative effort of an international group of sociologists motivated by their dedication to scholarship. The process of creation of this volume involved three kinds of invaluable contributors: the authors, the reviewers, and the supporters of the publication. The authors are expert sociologists with multiple and pressing commitments in teaching, research, consultancy and other activities related to their academic positions. Many of them were also in the leadership ranks of the ISA's Research Committees that embody the full range of specialized fields in sociology. Yet, despite their heavy commitments, they generously accepted our invitation to write their chapters and invested considerable time on this project. The authors presented their chapter drafts at the ISA Research Council Conference especially organized for the critical discussion of the drafts in Montreal on 6–7 August 1997. We wish to express our thanks to the University of Montreal's Rector, Dr Rene Simard, and to the Head of the Department of Sociology, Professor Nicole Laurin, for their generosity in hosting the conference. We also appreciate the kind collaboration of Gilles Pronovost who was the chairman of the Local Organizing Committee for the XIV World Congress of Sociology held in Montreal in July 1998.

After the conference we invited renowned experts in the respective specialized fields of sociology to serve as reviewers. We then sent each of the 26 submitted chapter drafts to two referees for double-blind anonymous peer review. Chapters that were rejected by the two reviewers were excluded from this volume. Every one of the reviewers has our deepest gratitude for accepting our invitation knowing that this was purely a labour of scholarship without any financial rewards. This project would not have been possible without their invaluable collaboration and critical assessment of each original chapter. In recognition of their effort, and as a gesture of our gratitude, we have enclosed the reviewers' names in this volume.

The strong support of the ISA, especially the President, Alberto Martinelli, and the Executive Secretary Izabela Barlinska, to the publication of this book is greatly appreciated. At their meetings preceding the XIV World Congress in July 1998, the ISA's Research Coordinating Committee, Publications Committee and Executive Committee placed this book as a top priority publication for ISA. Our appreciation goes also to SAGE Publications in London, in particular to Stephen Barr (Managing Director), Chris Rojek (Senior Editor for Sociology) and Jackie Griffin (Assistant Editor for Sociology) and to Julia Evetts, Editor of the SAGE Studies in International Sociology Series, for their cooperation in facilitating the publication of this *Handbook*.

We are indebted to all these colleagues in the international community of sociologists for their invaluable collaboration and support. We are delighted that our arduous task as editors has brought us two remarkable rewards: a better understanding of the transformation of our discipline; and the opportunity to work together in this project with a very distinguished and congenial group of authors, reviewers and supporters.

Stella Quah and Arnaud Sales

Editors

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