

Greetings Everyone,

Having said I will take over from Anthony Hogan as Convenor of the Applied Sociology Thematic Group, I want to thank Anthony for all the hard work he has put in to keeping us going, and to say “Hello” to you now that I am not just a name on the list. I have just looked at the CV I sent to Anthony, who has since distributed it to you, and see that I need to apologise for the uncorrected errors (mostly grammatical or spelling) that were in it. However, it gives you some idea of my background. I have tried to keep in touch with academia but most of my work has been in dealing with issues that were of concern to people at various levels in the community, by presenting them with an analysis of the issue from a sociological perspective.

At the first SAANZ Conference (the predecessor to TASA) we were told by our guest speaker (from England) that at his University, sociology was considered to be a suitable subject for Ph.D. candidates only. When I was doing my M.A., I was rebuked by some lecturers for suggesting ways in which their sociological theories could be applied. I was told that sociology should be kept as a pure science and not sullied by practical applications. Despite all this negativity, I have always believed that sociology has to be shown to have practical applications or it will die on the vine of academia.

Of course there have been many others who have tried to demonstrate sociology’s practical side. Two that I have found inspiration from are Ferdinand Tönnies and his later disciple Piotr Sztompka. These sociologists have concentrated on the practicality of sociology to help people in various communities to understand what is happening. However, in my experience, their broad applications have largely been ignored in academia.

I see TASA as providing a professional identity that should be equal to other professional organisations such as psychology, chemistry, economics etc for its members. This is not so important for those working in academia because their professional identity is confirmed by their department. However those of us working outside academia need the strength of professional identity. I see the Applied Sociology Group as a means of providing this strength for those working outside of academia. The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology (1994 Ed) tells people that “the notion of applied sociology is neither a discrete and developed area of the discipline nor a term which is commonly used by sociologists. It raises problems of ethics and professional autonomy”. The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology (2006 Ed) simply says “Applied Sociology See: POLICY RESEARCH”. We still have a lot to prove. We need to believe in our discipline and, if necessary, flaunt it. I have spent many years now being the lone sociologist in the midst of people from other disciplines and know how lonely that can be. Now that I have time on my hands I would like to devote some of it to help put a much better understanding of the practical application of sociology and those of us who are applying it.

In the meantime, if it is all getting too much for you, feel free to email me at [sjaicb@midcoast.com.au](mailto:sjaicb@midcoast.com.au).

Alan Scott