

Tribute

Richard Swedberg steps down from the editorial board

Richard Swedberg, one of the founders and the first editor of what is now *economic sociology: perspectives and conversations*, is stepping down from the editorial board, the first of the original editorial board members to do so in the publication's 25-year history. So much of *economic sociology* is connected with Richard, including the very idea behind it, that we want to take the opportunity both to thank him for his dedication and long-standing leadership and to recall some of the publication's history.

Richard started the first issue of the first volume of the then newsletter with this sentence: "The decision to publish an electronic newsletter of this type was formally taken by Jens Beckert, Johan Heilbron, Ton Korver and myself at the annual meeting of the European Sociological Association in Amsterdam in August 1999." During the first years the newsletter was hosted by SISWO, a Dutch interuniversity institute for social science research, which was exploring ways to internationalize its activities.

Initially subtitled "the European electronic newsletter" and now published in three issues per year, the publication has changed its name and design and grown in the number and geographical scope of its subscribers. Today, it is hosted by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne.

The most obvious difference between the first and the current issue is, perhaps, the design. If one goes back to the newsletter's first year, when Richard served as the editor and Reza Azarian as managing editor, the graphic design still reflects the age of typewriters. A mechanical typewriter was kept at Swedberg's Stockholm office for many years, its characteris-

tic noise audible from the hallway. The original title also highlighted the notion of an "electronic" newsletter, to distinguish it from the still common practice at the time of sending out newsletters printed on paper.

The newsletter showcased one of Richard's strengths: the unique combination of academic work of the highest caliber and an entrepreneurial spirit capable of breaking new ground. Today, *economic sociology* still tries to keep this spirit by giving new editors the freedom to develop the volume for which they are responsible in the ways they see fit, without much steering from the editorial board, whose role is to choose the incoming editor and provide support when needed. All the decisions about the topics and the authors are left to the editor.

Richard, who defended his dissertation at Boston University and spent many years in the United States, played a central role in defining the field of economic sociology during the 1980s and 1990s, most notably in his important collaborations with Mark Granovetter (1991) and Neil Smelser (Smelser and Swedberg 1994). He wrote book-length studies on the history and systematics of economic sociology, as well as on classical authors like Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber, and, perhaps most importantly, on Joseph Schumpeter. At Stockholm University and in the US, he functioned as a Schumpeterian entrepreneur facilitating the development of the New Economic Sociology by bringing various approaches together in "new combinations."

During this period Richard took many leadership roles to support economic sociology in Europe. Together with Gyorgy Lengyel he established the Eu-

European Sociological Association research network “Economic Sociology” (RN09) in 1995. Richard also organized an important conference in Stockholm, which resulted in special issues in two European sociology journals in 2001. At this conference he brought together not only those who had already made a name for themselves in sociology but also quite a few younger researchers. A good handful of those who were there later became editors of the newsletter and/or active in the research network of the ESA. Works in economic sociology had of course been published in Europe before, as Swedberg writes in his first editorial to the newsletter. But by helping to create an organizational infrastructure, the initiatives guided by Richard turned economic sociology

into a field with recognizable institutional structures also in Europe.

Once an academic field has become institutionalized, it can thrive within the structures created. It is perhaps natural at this point, and indeed a strength, that the person who has formed the field so decisively wants to take a step back from the administrative work. As past editors and current board members of today’s *Economic Sociology: Perspectives and Conversations*, we are very grateful to Richard Swedberg, who put his scholarly commitment and entrepreneurial energy at the service of the newsletter and economic sociology more generally. For this we thank him wholeheartedly.

The editorial board

References

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