Summary

World Social Science Report

2010

Knowledge Divides

World Social Science Report

Knowledge Divides

Summary

UNESCO
UNESCO Publishing

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

International Social Science Council

ISSC
international social science council

Introduction

Ten years after publishing the first *World Social Science Report* in 1999, UNESCO asked the International Social Science Council (ISSC) to produce a new comprehensive review of the state of the social sciences: how social science knowledge is produced, disseminated and used. The situation of and the conditions for the social sciences – the opportunities and constraints regarding training, research and applications – vary greatly across the world. Hence, the leading theme of this Report became knowledge divides: how social science disciplines are coping and evolving in the face of unequal conditions and diverging trends.

In preparing the 2010 *World Social Science Report,* ISSC mobilized the global social science community – hundreds of professional social scientists contributed as authors, editorial board members, or reviewers. Most contributors were selected after an international call for papers in a variety of social science networks and from ISSC members. The editorial team received several hundred proposals. Authors were chosen so that researchers from all parts of the world and from different disciplines would have a voice. Other authors were recruited from the participants in the World Social Science Forum convened by the ISSC in Bergen (Norway) in May 2009.

The Report points to many achievements. Social sciences are now truly global in the sense that they are taught almost everywhere and their research results are widely disseminated, increasingly by new information technologies. Doctoral awards in the social sciences have grown more rapidly than in the other science fields. Moreover, social science has become institutionalized: a large number of social scientists work as scholars and researchers at universities but they also work as experts in national public administrations, in private enterprises or as independent professionals. Social science expertise is in high demand by policy makers, media and the public. Furthermore, social science concepts and theories influence public opinion and public debates more than ever before. These are all indications of social sciences' success.

But with success and growth have come criticism. It has been pointed out that few economists foresaw the economic crisis that started in 2008 and that conflicting advice has been given on dealing with it. Political scientists are sometimes accused of not anticipating deep changes in opinion; sociologists of failing to identify major social trends, etc. In the face of global challenges which demonstrate that problems are increasingly interrelated, and spread fast from one part of the world to another, traditional disciplinary boundaries are questioned. The social sciences have been accused of being fragmented, overspecialized and sometimes too abstruse and disconnected. Hence, their capacity to provide answers has been questioned: they are recognized, but are they relevant? Protracted epistemological debates have emphasized the tenuousness of this recognition.

In reality, social sciences have become so diffuse and widespread that nobody notices their role in understanding and shaping our world and daily lives any more. Without them, most public policies would simply not exist and many individual and collective decisions would be difficult. Social sciences make history and, as a result, they change their environment. Hence, their findings and concepts must be constantly re-evaluated. From the beginning, social sciences have endeavoured to bring rational wisdom to economic, social, political and personal topics that used to be dealt with through personal beliefs and religion. Economic growth, justice, governance, democracy, human rights, education, inequality and diversity as well as many other concepts would be largely unknown without social sciences' contributions. These phenomena would simply not be understood or properly analysed. They would not lead to any political actions.

Today, the natural sciences are imperative to address challenges such as AIDS, children's health, hunger and climate change, but they are insufficient. Indeed, complaints about the detrimental consequences of science have increased, and technology and scientific findings are no longer accepted without discussion.

Social sciences are needed to understand and influence how humans act. They are crucial to implement the UN Millennium Development Goals: from reducing poverty to promoting gender equality; they are needed to face challenges such as climate change, which are as much social as natural.

Hence, to face current and future challenges and effectively address global and local problems, more and better social science is vital. To cope, capacity must be built, particularly in the regions where social problems are most acute and social science is most anemic.

This Report describes a number of the problems that social sciences face: the inequalities and asymmetries which all, one way or another, hamper the accumulation, transmission and use of knowledge in different societies.

Some are concerned with the regional divide and the huge disparities in research capacities across countries and regions of the world: the geographical divide (Chapter 2), the capacity divide (Chapter 3), the uneven internationalization and unequal production of articles and books across countries (Chapter 4). Two other divides are concerned with the fragmentation of knowledge: the divide between mainstream research and alternative approaches (Chapter 5) and the divide between disciplines (Chapter 6). The competition resulting from new managerial practices (Chapter 7), the sometimes tense relations between academics and society (Chapter 8) and those between academics and policy-makers (Chapter 9) constitute other divides that reduce the effectiveness of social sciences' response to global challenges.

UN assists elections in Burundi
© UN Photo/M. Perret

Introduction

Climate change hits poor people hardest. Thailand
© Still Pictures/UNEP/Werchai Wansamngan

Chapter 1
Social sciences facing the world

In Chapter 1, distinguished scholars from a range of social science disciplines engage with global challenges and major social trends. The world they depict is one of profound and menacing developments. It faces global challenges such as environmental change, high inequality, poverty and financial crisis, while human societies are affected by trends such as ageing, social marginalization, and the rise of cities as strategic economic spaces in the global economy.

The authors make no secret of the fact that these issues facing society are also challenges for their disciplines, forcing them to adjust.

'The scale, rate, magnitude and significance of changes to the global environment have made it clear that "research as usual" will not suffice to help individuals and groups understand and respond to the multiple, interacting changes that are now occurring.' (O'Brien)

The struggles to overcome global challenges and to understand major social trends have become multiplayer games. And they are games in which the social sciences can make a difference. The social sciences provide the classificatory, descriptive and analytical tools and narratives that allow us to see, name and explain the developments confronting human societies. They allow us to decode underlying concepts, assumptions and mental maps in the debates on these developments. They also provide the instruments to gauge policies and initiatives, and to determine what works and what does not.

One precondition for the assessment of current developments and where they are leading us is to develop the right instruments and observation categories. The results of social science research can be surprising and even daunting at times: different characterizations of inequality, for instance, produce very different pictures of the extent and evolution of global inequality. As Figure 1 illustrates, depending on the concept used, global inequality has either been increasing or decreasing over the years. But the social sciences also provide particularly appropriate methods for generating and debating the tools with which societies can observe and assess their development. The Report's contributors share the conviction that today's global challenges require former methodologies and approaches to be revisited, and new ones to be developed.

Global and local

There is a growing conviction among social scientists that more attention needs to be paid to the plurality of contexts, and that cultural dimensions are crucial in forming these contexts. Worldviews, beliefs, institutions and history shape the way different people perceive and react to a phenomenon. This may sound like a truism, but the implications of cultural difference are clearer than ever in the face of current global challenges. For example, the use of a simple index to measure poverty, such as defining the poor as those who live on less than $1 per day, fails to question what poverty means for those who actually experience it and may therefore lead to solutions believed to be valid everywhere but which are effective nowhere. The actions of the poor sometimes contradict the assumptions behind the proposed solutions.

Figure 1 — The mother of all inequality disputes: three ways of looking at global inequality, 1952–2007
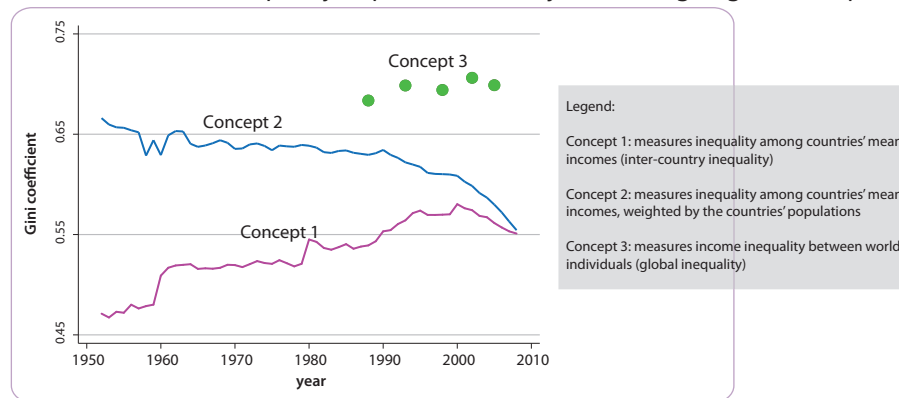
Source: See Milanovic in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure 1.1).

'The paradox of global poverty is that it has drawn worldwide attention to a phenomenon that is in need of urgent action from a range of global players, yet, by decontextualizing poverty, it invites "solutions" that are largely ineffective.' (Gupta)

Culture, however, does not in itself provide the last word on contexts. Instead, a local context is the sum of a realm of economic, social, gender, ethnic, institutional, political, technological, environmental and cultural dynamics. Understanding these dynamics, and developing methodologies to make them visible, are vital preconditions for the development of adequate, locally embedded responses to major trends and developments. Even authors such as David E. Apter, who plead for the production of new global theories (he specifically makes a case for a new modernization theory), insist that such theories, applicable everywhere, should pay close attention to the ways people interpret their realities. There are no context-free responses to global challenges.

Regional emphasis

Global developments have implications for the social sciences everywhere. But there are also regional emphases in research. The heads of regional councils of research in social sciences depict these emphases in relation to what they consider to be the main challenges for social science research in their region.

The Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) underscores the point that poverty and inequality remain the burning topics of social science research in Latin American and Caribbean countries. In the past, Latin American scholars have made outstanding contributions to world social science in such domains as education, democracy, and economic development. Today, however, the lack of resources for research hampers the development of social sciences and threatens to isolate researchers.

In the Arab countries, a somewhat similar situation prevails. As the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) shows, the paucity of regional research funding, and the emphasis on different national priorities and policies, have led to the research community's fragmentation. This fragmentation is increased by the range of topics that the social science research community in the Arab states addresses. But despite these issues, it is possible to identify common concerns such as the quest for democracy, the elaboration of Arab identity and nationalism in the context of changing regional dynamics, and themes that are part of the global development agenda, such as the empowerment of women. In many countries in the region, political conditions prevent a genuine and free discussion of these issues, but this situation is not unique to the Arab world.

It is arguably in Asia that the contrasts between the research landscapes of the different countries are greatest. While stressing the positive aspects of these contrasts, the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (AASSREC) also mentions their potential to hinder attempts to effectively address broader issues such as global warming and demographic and migration challenges in the region.

In sub-Saharan Africa, social science themes have over the years evolved from topics such as structural adjustment, poverty, gender, the spread of armed conflicts, and HIV and AIDS to more recent concerns such as citizenship and rights in an era of crisis, and the response to neoliberalism. The big challenge, however, is to reconstruct autonomous social science research in Africa. But as the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) points out, the lack of a research infrastructure prevents social scientists from contributing as much as they could to these social endeavours.☺

Chapter 2
The institutional geography of social science

Chapter 2 maintains the geographical focus by analysing the institutional organization of social science research systems in different regions and major countries. The differences in conditions for social science knowledge production between different countries and regions of the world are astounding and could hardly be greater.

Interregional and intraregional disparities

There are huge discrepancies around the world in the size, financing level, institutional structure, infrastructure and condition of social science research systems, and in their production of graduates and publications.

'North American social science exerts a large global influence due to its scale, its research productivity, and the number of international social scientists educated in its PhD programmes.' (Calhoun)

'Russian social science communities are dynamic, but are not as well developed as their Western counterparts. They are often driven to produce superficial analyses under pressure for quick results.' (Pipiya)

'[In sub-Saharan Africa] the precarious state of many of the [social science and humanities] research centres [...] is indicative of a more general trend in research and scholarship in many African countries – the de-institutionalization of science.' (Mouton)

But there are also striking divides within regions and countries. In Latin America, over two-thirds of all post-graduate programmes are offered by public universities in Brazil and Mexico, and the institutions offering these programmes are also those where most of the research is carried out. In sub-Saharan Africa, 75 per cent of academic publications in the Web of Science database come from South African, Nigerian and Kenyan social scientists in a handful of universities. Similar disparities can be observed in China and in South Asia.

'90 per cent of higher education institutions in the [Latin American] region are only engaged in teaching activities.' (Vessuri and Sonsiré López)

'Barring some centres of excellence in India, social sciences as a whole are accorded low priority in the whole South Asian region.' (Krishna and Krishna)

Actors and institutions

In most countries, research is predominantly conducted in universities or in research centres associated with them. One major exception is that in countries previously under Soviet influence, social science research is still done mainly in institutes and academies outside universities. Public research centres where academics can dedicate themselves entirely to research and do little or no teaching also exist in Western and Central Europe. Those research academies, centres and institutes have long traditions of achievement and are not likely to disappear in the near future. Worldwide, however, the dominant tendency is to grant universities broader responsibilities for the organization of research, and to maintain links between research and teaching. At the same time, consultancy firms and NGOs have emerged as significant

actors in many regions and countries. They conduct short-term applied research at the request of international donors or private foundations.

Role of funding agencies

Governments and universities used to be the main source of funding for social science research, and have played a critical role in its development. In India, for example, the University Grants Commission, the main body administering universities, has played a crucial role in promoting social science research. But the shortage of public funding has become an issue almost everywhere, and changes this situation. This is most obviously the case in countries where state subsidies have become the exception rather than the rule, as in sub-Saharan Africa and some countries of South Asia, rendering social scientists and research centres heavily dependent on external donor funding.

In most developed countries, fewer public resources are allocated directly to research institutions and universities than before, and competitive allocation of funds and project funding has become predominant. This evolution potentially transforms the funding bodies that are distributing public subsidies into major institutional players. In this panorama, the United States of America is something of an exception. It is not dependent on one central public funder, and the diversity of funding sources in the USA has been a source of vitality for its research in social sciences. Other countries can also count on a tradition of private or semi-private support, be it through foundations (e.g. in Western and Central Europe, India), liberal elites (Egypt, Lebanon), or influential families (the Gulf states), but not to the same extent as in the USA. In some Latin American countries, social science councils used to provide substantial funding without interfering with the content and orientation of research. Recently, however, they have started assuming a more active role in defining research agendas.

The extent to which funding agencies – at national or international level – influence the research agenda and the conduct of the research itself raises concerns among social scientists in many countries in the global North and South. In some regions, external donor agencies, such as regional and international funding agencies, have become the main source of research funding, with decisive outcomes for the kind of research undertaken. Those who pay the cost of research often control the research agenda.

Status of social science research

Chapter 2 also considers the status of social science research in society, and its influence on public debates and policy. Some 'public' social scientists enjoy recognition in their country as columnists or advisors, working for think-tanks or holding reputable professional posts. In some countries (e.g. China and Brazil), social science research is considered essential to the country's development. But in many other countries, the natural sciences are still receiving all the attention. In the Arab world, higher education, and to a certain degree research, have benefited from changing levels of support from national governments over time. But demands for the social sciences arise from a variety of sources (including local businesses, the general public, the state, the media, international organizations, etc.). This has consequences which include the proliferation of private research centres as well as a change in the hierarchy of disciplines.☉

Bubel village in Orissa: map showing areas where 'scheduled' or lowest caste people live
© UNESCO/O. Brendan

Chapter 3
Unequal capacities

The disparities in the volume, quality and visibility of social science research highlighted in Chapter 2, and the continued supremacy of American-European social sciences, result in large part from disparities in research capacity. Chapter 3 addresses the challenges raised by this divide in social science research capacity, and analyses how capacity in social science can be developed and improved.

Three levels of research capacity

Understanding what research capacity in social sciences is, and what limits it, is crucial to the development of an appropriate strategy for capacity improvement. The creation of knowledge presupposes adequate institutional infrastructures, access to funding, and integration into scientific communities. This points to the existence of three levels of capacity: the individual level, the organizational level and the overall system level. The degree of coordination between these three dimensions of research capacity determines the scope for improving the capacity of social science research systems. Initiatives which focus on one level of research capacity without considering its relations with the other two usually lead to very limited results. The example of Kenya illustrates how efforts to improve access to social science higher education remain narrow because the limitations at the institutional and system levels were not addressed as well.

> *'Arab countries generally share certain common features: poor quality of education, particularly in the social sciences and […] limited attention to […] the social science disciplines. […] As a result, social sciences have a diminishing role in response to societal problems and public interest, and only a modest role in informing policies and effecting social change.'* (Shami and Elgeziri)

The role of consultancy firms and NGOs

In many developing countries, consultancy firms and NGOs conduct short-term applied research projects at the request of international funding agencies or private foundations. These initiatives enhance the local visibility of social science research, and help orient knowledge production toward relevant policy issues. But paradoxically, we also see indications that the multiplication of these bodies does not result in as big an improvement of knowledge as might be expected. Instead of boosting research capacity, the funding practices of these agencies may deplete it, by privileging short-term studies which do not facilitate the accumulation of knowledge and theorization, or by not paying enough attention to the empirical validity of research findings.

In low-income countries, the increasing role of consultancy firms and NGOs in social science research follows the relative or absolute shrinking of public funds allocated to universities, for research in general and for the social sciences in particular. In such conditions, academics rarely have the chance of working on long-term projects involving strong theoretical considerations. More research is undertaken outside universities and national research organizations in developed countries as well. Yet there such practices are far less harmful to academe and to research, as the proportion of scholars working in consultancy firms or think-tanks remains limited in relative terms.

3

Brain drain or brain circulation

Brain drain – the term for the migration of highly skilled people from a less to a more developed country – has been discussed extensively in the past decade. It often starts with the migration of students, which is one of the most important issues in the current international competition for human capital. The USA is the largest receiving country today, with Europe in second place. But other poles of attraction have developed, and have resulted in new North/North or South/South movements, as well as in circular flows. Many low-income countries express deep concern that their investment in educating and training social scientists is lost to the benefit of other countries.

Several countries are trying to reduce the effect of brain drain, and put in place incentives to persuade graduates to come back after they receive their degree from a foreign university. Such incentives can include the guarantee of a position for some (e.g. China and Mexico), or the establishment of international networks and collaborations with national researchers working abroad (Argentina, Colombia, China and the Philippines). But the efficiency of these measures remains limited as long as working conditions do not improve significantly in the sending countries.

Discussion of the brain drain has shifted recently, from a perspective which stresses the negative impacts for the sending countries towards one which regards brain circulation as a component of the broader circulation of ideas. The Philippines is one country which has witnessed constant migration flows of professionals and scholars since the mid-1960s. This diaspora is central in building cooperation with scholars in their country of origin, thus helping their integration into international research networks. On the recipient side, one economics PhD holder out of three and almost one social science PhD holder out of five working in the USA were born abroad.

Comprehensive strategies to overcome capacity deficits

If growing numbers of students, PhD graduates and publications are meaningful indicators of research capacity, Brazil and China are two large countries which have succeeded in bolstering research capacity in social sciences. Their success has been achieved through comprehensive and well-resourced long-term policies involving the implementation of postgraduate degrees in top-level universities, scholarships for studying abroad, programmes aiming at repatriating students with a degree from a foreign university, international fellowships allowing professors to spend sabbatical leave in foreign universities, and incentives to publish in international peer-reviewed journals.

But small countries can also develop and sustain research capacity. Palestinian capacity in social sciences has been built by training students abroad in some of the best universities and maintaining a vibrant community of researchers around the world. Other strategies can include e-learning and collaborative tools in digital social sciences (as in New Zealand and the Pacific islands).

Any comprehensive policy intended to develop social science research capacity should pay attention to the development of networks. Important experiences in this domain include training and mentoring programmes, the joint production of teaching materials, and the enhancement of connectivity and collaborations involving diaspora and local social scientists. Such networks and initiatives can only be successful if universities are strengthened.

'The struggle for the restoration of the African universities must continue […] It is in the strength and vitality of the universities that the social science networks will ultimately find the energy to make a decisive and targeted difference.' (Olukoshi)

University library. University of La Rochelle, France
© Université de La Rochelle

Chapter 4
# Uneven internationalization

This chapter addresses the internationalization of the social sciences by mapping global production and international collaboration in the social sciences.

There are many ways of assessing the internationalization of the social sciences. One is to determine where social science journals and papers are produced, and whether this production is spread equally across the world. Another is to measure whether citations in social science articles are more international today than before. And a third is to measure the share of papers co-authored by social scientists from different regions and countries. These indicators can be constructed by using the various databases of social science journals, publications and articles, including Thomson Reuters Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), Ulrich, Elsevier's Scopus, and the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences. Discussing the data provided by all these indicators, the authors in

Chapter 4 confirm a growing internationalization of social science production over the past two decades, but depict a process that has remained slow and unevenly distributed.

Over the 1998–2007 decade, North America alone produced more than half of the social science articles registered in the Thomson Reuters SSCI database (Figure 2). Europe comes second, with almost 40 per cent of the world's social science articles published. In terms of citations, the internationalization of social science research in developing countries mainly takes the form of a growing dependence on studies and research produced in Europe and North America. Internationalization thus tends to reinforce the centrality of the North. Another sign of this dependence is linguistic. Over 85 per cent of the social sciences refereed journals covered in the Ulrich database are edited in English.

Figure 2 — Production in the social sciences by region
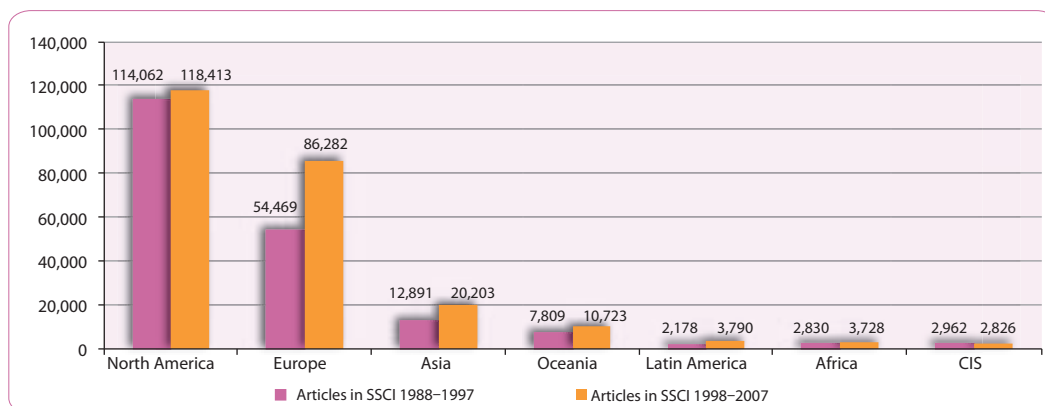
Source: Social Science Citation Index. See Gingras and Mosbah-Natanson in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure 4.5).

The USA is the primary country for international collaborations in social sciences, followed by the UK, Canada and Australia. Although still in the pole position, North America's share of international collaborations has declined slightly in the past decade, while that of Western Europe has increased (Figure 3). Although there are signs of change, international collaborations retain a very strong core–periphery pattern and have a highly asymmetrical structure of exchange.

However, the contribution of other regions to the world production of articles is slowly growing. Asia's share has increased in the past decade to reach 9 per cent. In comparison to Latin American countries and India, China shows the highest growth in the overall production of articles appearing in international databases over the period 1995–2007 (see Figure 4). This growth is especially visible in management science.

'Despite the globalization of research in general and research collaboration in particular, peripheral regions have not become better integrated into the world social science system over the past two decades. This means that the Western dominance of social science remains a pertinent issue.' (Frenken, Hoekman and Hardeman)↷

Figure 3 — Share of regions in total collaborative world social science, 1989–2008
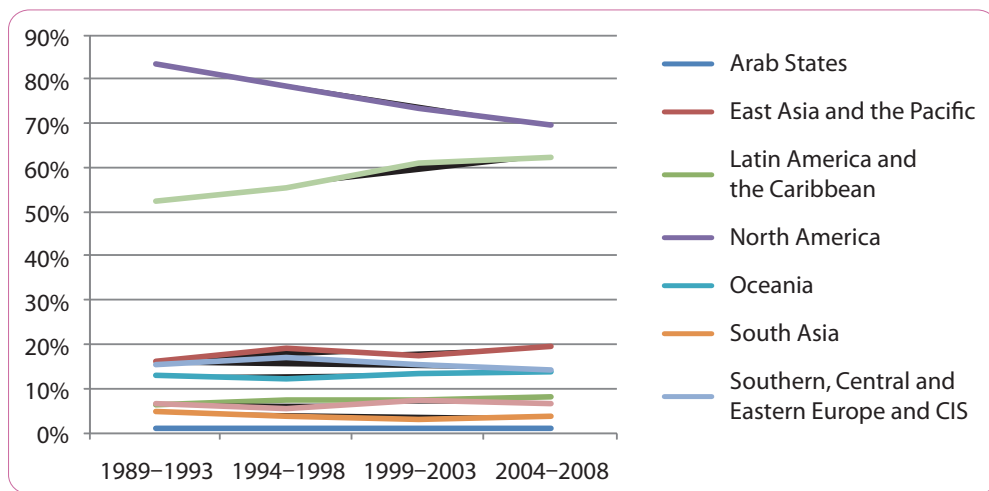
Source: Social Science Citation Index. See Frenken, Hoekman and Hardeman in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4 — Total annual production of research papers
in Latin America and the Caribbean, China and India, 1995-2007
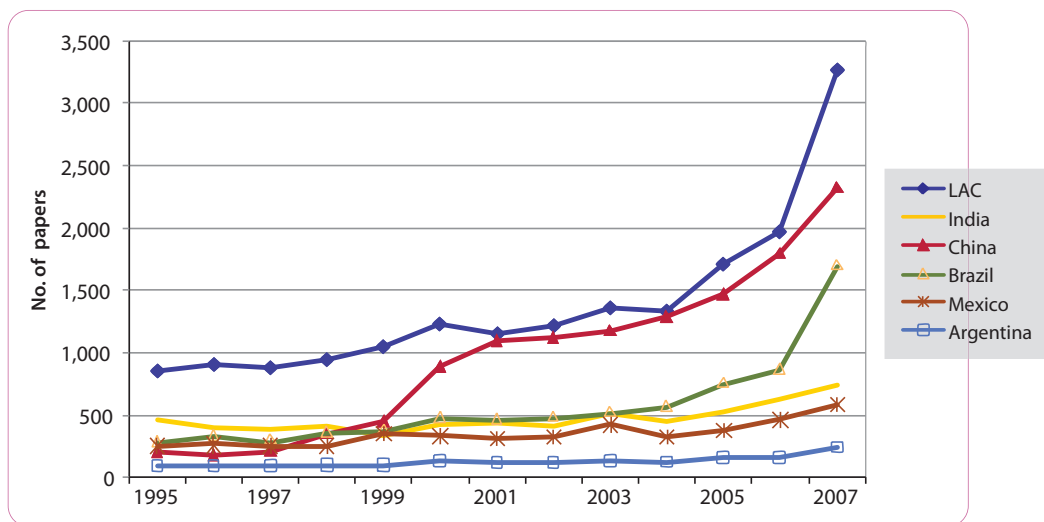
Note: LAC = total Latin America and the Caribbean.
Source: Social Science Citation Index. See Russell and Ainsworth in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure 4.7).

Chapter 5
Homogenizing or pluralizing social sciences?

The North's leading position in output, illustrated in the previous chapter, suggests a decisive role in determining which issues are considered relevant, and what methodologies and analytical tools are thought to produce significant knowledge. At the same time, the internationalization of research may be allowing the emergence of other voices, challenging Northern concepts of relevance and significance.

What is global? What is local?
Sociology offers an example of the reinforcement of Northern hegemony, and of the marginalization of Southern realities. In this discipline, the global South's intellectual dependency on Northern production is reinforced by an unequal division of labour in international collaborations whereby Southern researchers gather empirical data and leave the discussion of the theoretical implications to their Northern colleagues.

Studies of global and local issues coexist. But local issues with potential global relevance often fail to receive global recognition unless they have been appropriated by North-Western academics. Examples of this process include South African labour studies and indigenous knowledge from various parts of the world.

In the Maghreb, a study of the catalogue of the King Abdulaziz Foundation Library in Morocco illustrates how a decision to either tackle 'external' or 'internal' topics, i.e., topics on the

Figure 5 — Disciplines and language for authors originating from the Maghreb, 1985–2004

% Language in the main disciplines (authors from the Maghreb)
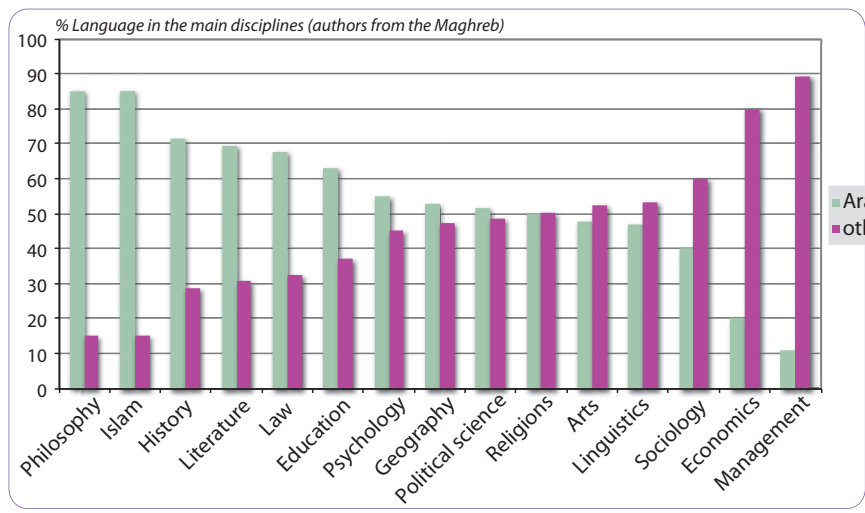
Source: See Waast, Arvanitis, Richard-Waast and Rossi in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure 5.3).

mainstream agenda or of local concern, usually goes hand in hand with the publication language. External topics are more likely to be published in English or French.

Similar divisions exist in other countries. Japanese historians and sociologists working on Japan-centred topics fail by and large to receive international attention, even when their work might have implications beyond the national context, whereas their colleagues working on 'global' topics can be better integrated into international networks.

Challenging hegemonies

In recent decades, several 'schools' and 'turns' have challenged North Atlantic mainstream production in social sciences. The present context for internationalization criticizes the 'irrelevance' of mainstream Northern social science production for analysing the South, and stimulates claims for greater recognition of local realities and forms of knowledge. In China, a balance is sought between 'intellectual independence' in topics and broader 'academic exchanges with social scientists from around the world'.

'General theories do not take into account the experience of the majority of humanity: those living in the global

South. Nor do they recognize the social theories produced in the South.' (Keim)

Counter-hegemonic challenges come also from the North. The universality and the value-neutral objectivity of science have been deeply questioned in Western countries, notably by feminists. This movement of criticism and re-evaluation has opened the way for the notion of 'standpoint research'. This concept considers all knowledge as situated knowledge. Consequently, the enlargement of knowledge can only result from the multiplication of 'standpoints' on a specific topic.

Local and global studies have opposing limits and risks. Global research runs the risk of being irrelevant to many local specificities. It can imply the application of an irrelevant framework of analysis, a distorted understanding of the local situation, and the omission of important local issues. But local studies may often amount to narrow empiricism, insufficient comparisons and little scope for generalization. The challenge is to construct interpretative frameworks and outcomes that are scientific, therefore universal, and relevant, i.e. suitable for the study of the local context and the world from local standpoints.☺

Periods from Haitian history, National Office of Ethnology, Port-au-Prince, Haiti
© UNESCO/F. Brugman
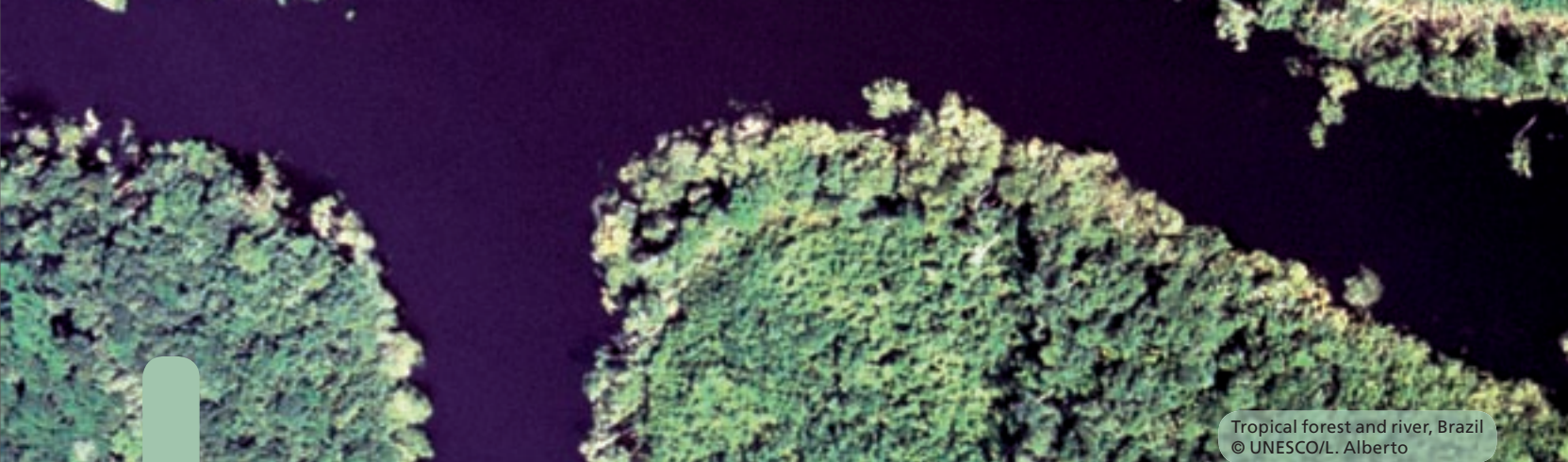
Tropical forest and river, Brazil
© UNESCO/L. Alberto

Chapter 6
Disciplinary territories

In the face of global challenges and social trends, traditional disciplinary boundaries are being questioned. Chapter 6 explores the divides between national traditions and research systems, between and within disciplines, and between the social sciences and other forms of disciplinary knowledge such as the natural sciences and the humanities. These divisions are not fixed. New domains emerge, some merge, and a few may disappear.

Boundaries between disciplines

If one attempts to speculate on the future of social science disciplines by looking at their evolution over the past two centuries, one might suggest that we have reached a post-disciplinary age in which the social sciences and the natural sciences have to integrate themselves. In this scenario, the age of disciplines may not yet have reached its end, but other ways of organizing knowledge are set to emerge at a local, regional and supranational level. New forms of cooperation between scientists from various disciplines and other types of social actors might be produced in these new settings.

But the diagnosis can be different if, instead of a historical perspective, a more formal approach to knowledge renewal is adopted. Some theories of the evolution of disciplines contend that divides and splits are necessary steps in the development of any form of knowledge. According to such analytical frameworks, disciplinary and sub-disciplinary divides in the social sciences occur continuously and will continue to do so, and the autonomy of the social sciences needs to be protected. Disciplines are still essential for the renewal of knowledge and for the creativity of scientists.

Figure 6 — Weight of the disciplines in SSCI output
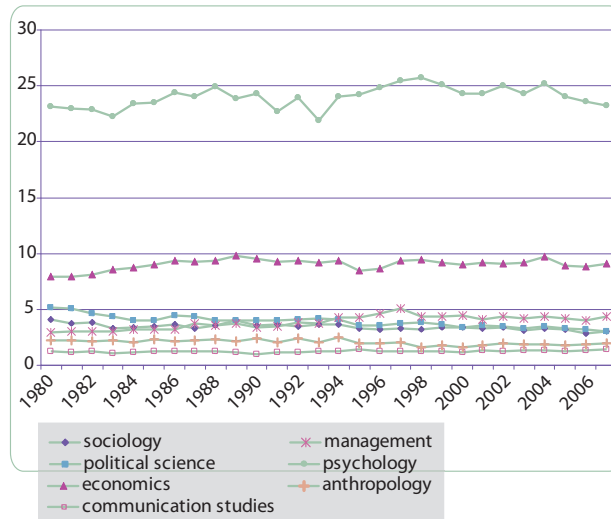
Source: Social Science Citation Index. See Jonkers in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure 6.1).

In principle, all disciplines may enjoy a similar status. The reality of the production of knowledge, as measured in international databases, is however that disciplines do not have equal weight. The combined psychology fields and economics form the largest share of the output captured in the Social Science Citation Index.

Reconfiguring the boundaries

The interactions between social science disciplines are complex, as the relationship between sociology and economics in recent decades shows. In comparison to economics, sociology

6
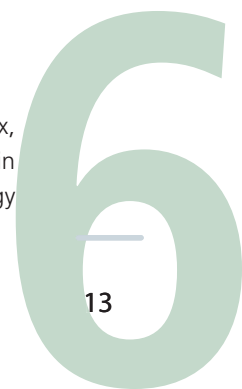
remains more embedded in a national context, more oriented towards universities and academic circles, and less related to public policy-making. Nevertheless, and despite differences and often conflicting interests, sociology and economics have multiplied their intellectual and methodological relationships in recent years.

The divides between and within disciplines are moving, and these reconfigurations have various consequences. One is the increasing specialization of social scientific knowledge. Another concerns the integration of social sciences. The question of an integrated social science has been a recurrent one since the emergence of academic social sciences in the 19th and 20th centuries. Current discussions of their potential unification emphasize their integration while preserving the cumulative character of the different disciplines and the multiplicity of outlooks they offer.

Interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, trandisciplinarity

As disciplinary boundaries shift, some participants in the social sciences respond by attempting to overcome the harmful consequences of subject divisions without creating a fully integrated social science. This involves increasing interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. One could argue over definitions. But instead we can agree that when scientists from various disciplines gather to deal with a problem, one talks of multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. When scientists coming from various disciplines work together to address a problem and take into account each other's constraints, one talks of transdisciplinarity: transdisciplinarity is said to be more integrative than interdisciplinarity and seeks to go beyond disciplinary knowledge.

Divides between social sciences and natural sciences in particular, but also between social sciences and arts and humanities, are challenged because they impede attempts to deal with global problems and with developments affecting human societies. New scientific fields of study – including cognitive science, new evolutionary theory, bioethics, environmental studies, law and literature – involve people who are crossing the boundaries of disciplinary cultures.

Needless to say, crossing disciplinary and epistemic cultures is a difficult endeavour. The obstacles to multidisciplinary research collaboration to confront a global challenge such as climate change are numerous, because they call for fundamental changes in the habits of social scientists and other scientists.

'Social scientists are wordier than physical scientists; some social scientists believe in the social construction of scientific knowledge, a belief that can undercut collaboration with physical scientists; [they] often employ a wide range of theoretical approaches; [they] are particularly sensitive to small differences of time, space and culture; and disciplinary loyalties in the social sciences often interfere with multidisciplinary collaboration.'
(Balstad)

These barriers to cooperation across the social/physical divide are not insurmountable. Inspiration for effective transdisciplinary cooperation can be taken from psychology, a discipline whose situation at the crossroads between the social and biological sciences provides numerous examples of contact and collaboration between various forms of knowledge. A recent field of research in which psychologists have crossed the disciplinary boundaries in creative ways is social change research. Psychologists have recourse to a variety of tools and methods to investigate how people deal with the demands of social change, and how policy decisions can be informed to facilitate positive adaptation to change. Sustainable behaviours and human well-being are other fields in which psychologists are increasingly crossing the divides between disciplines.

'The reality that human development is shaped by changing societal constraints requires more interdisciplinary research with the social and also the biological sciences. Broader interdisciplinary collaboration helps by capturing 'bio-psycho-social' functioning.'
(Silbereisen, Ritchie and Overmier)

Regional variations

Trends and innovations across the social science disciplines should also be considered regionally, since research agendas may vary from one area to the other. The Report offers an outlook on regional developments in two countries, the USA and India. What is striking in the US case is the unique rich-ness and broad diversity of the production in social sciences, the largest in the world. Since it is generally believed to be hegemonic, the overview may suggest some hints on the immediate future of the world social sciences. In India, three specific domains have led innovative research in recent years, namely development, gender, and rural and urban studies.

Chapter 7
Competing in the knowledge society

In recent decades, the growing importance of higher education and research as drivers of economic growth has led to an increase in international competition between countries, institutions and researchers. Chapter 7 deals with the ranking of universities, the assessment of research and its role in project funding.

Bibliometrics

Bibliometrics is widely used to evaluate the performance and impact of research. But its use highlights important problems in the social sciences. One of these is the focus of bibliometrics on journal articles, underplaying or disregarding other publications such as books, reports and non-academic media. This may explain why bibliometrics is more broadly accepted in social science disciplines such as economics and psychology, which share the natural sciences' predilection for journal articles. Another issue with bibliometrics concerns its strong linguistic and geographical biases. Publication in peer-reviewed journals usually means publication in Anglo-American journals.

> *'Social sciences and humanities knowledge production can be observed using bibliometric methods only when the greatest care is taken. The existing peer-reviewed journal databases are incomplete and do not satisfactorily cover languages other than English.'* (Archambault and Larivière)

University rankings

International rankings of universities are heavily based on bibliometrics. They have also become a prominent feature of competition between research systems and research organizations. The first of these rankings was originally commissioned by the Chinese Government as a way to benchmark its own research universities in order to pursue its aim of developing 'world-class universities'. But the impact of the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities has reached far beyond China's borders. Other rankings have followed using different criteria and indicators, such as the QS/Times Higher Education ranking (QS/THE) and the Scimago Institutional Ranking.

Though controversial, university rankings have become increasingly popular and are taken as signals of quality in a global environment. One of their perverse effects can be to undermine the social, intellectual and cultural role of universities in their own societies.

Especially in the countries of the global South, but also in Europe and North America, most universities cannot hope to perform well on the measures used in these international rankings. Nor should they necessarily try to. Not that the evaluation of university performance is of little value; evaluations and benchmarking can be a central part of a strategy to improve quality. But there are other instruments which are more suitable to assessing how universities perform in their different functions.

Evaluating research

Alongside cross-national or worldwide comparisons, national governments and agencies have stepped up efforts to evaluate the quality of research, the performance of departments, and the most productive individual

7

researchers. Undertaken to boost research performance and optimize resource allocation, these exercises increasingly use quantitative indicators such as bibliometrics. Performance indicators based on bibliometrics have severe limitations for the evaluation of research in countries where only a small number of articles are published in international peer-reviewed journals.

What is the alternative? Good practice suggests that research assessment should combine quantitative data with qualitative information, based for example on peer review; that it should recognize differences between research disciplines, and that it should include some element of self-evaluation. The history of the UK Research Assessment Exercise shows how complex a task it is to design a national assessment system that is both fair and effective. Spain has developed an evaluation system for individual researchers which couples bibliometric approaches and peer-review evaluations. Also, to address the language bias of main citation indices, Spain, in common with China, uses local language bibliographical databases in its evaluation processes.

Project funding

Different countries use different approaches to finance social science research. But competitive project funding is increasingly used in research financing. Here again, peer review plays an important role. But proposal peer review is not free from problems, including 'reviewer fatigue' and poor transparency. In the end, when there is not enough money to fund all good research, the final decisions are not simply explained by peer-review scores or the bibliometric quality profiles of applicants.

The Chinese resource allocation mechanisms increasingly resemble the models in use in OECD countries. In its evaluations too, China now adopts a mix of bibliometrics and peer review. Changes in funding policy and programmes in Canada have allowed an increasingly strong focus on efforts to make social science research more visible to a diversity of publics. The experience of the Dutch Research Council illustrates on the other hand that social scientists are responsive to societal needs, even when responding to open calls for fundamental research proposals.◡

Harvard University, USA. A 'world-class' university
© iStockphoto/J. Salcedo

Chapter 8
Disseminating social sciences

Chapter 8 analyses the dissemination of social science knowledge in society. It investigates the capacity of social science to educate, engage with public issues and inform public debate.

Social scientists have a complex relationship with societies. On the one hand, they belong to their own societies and are influenced by their evolution. On the other, they observe social developments and contribute to shaping them. These strong multi-directional influences determine the key positions from which social scientists participate in society and in debate: as transmitters of knowledge, as experts, as observers of social phenomena and as critical thinkers.

Social sciences in high schools and universities

Educating students is one of the main channels through which social scientists disseminate their ideas and concepts and imprint their influence on society. In many countries, social sciences are first taught in high school, as history, geography, civics and social studies. They form part of the education of future and committed citizens, although paradoxically they are given less importance at school level than are the humanities.

At university level, social sciences attract on average about a third of all higher education students. Who are those social science graduates and where are they working? According to a survey of social science PhD holders in 25 OECD countries, a sizeable proportion of them end up doing research and teaching, and a significant number act as experts in government administrations and agencies, or

in businesses in some countries. In the OECD countries, a large number of social scientists obtain their PhD later than their colleagues in natural sciences. In many countries their rate of unemployment is lower than that among the whole population of doctorate holders.

A strong presence

Large numbers of academics, experts, managers, professionals and leaders have benefited from an education in social sciences, and, one hopes, apply social science knowledge and skills in their professional life. Their presence is strong in ministries and public administration, thereby granting social scientists opportunities to influence public policy. Whether the social scientists in the 'corridors of power' actually influence the quality of the decisions taken is difficult to tell.

Publications and digital social sciences

Publications are an important part of the dissemination of social sciences. Recent economic processes of concentration have led the few major international publishing houses to raise the prices of their journals and emphasize sales volume. Fewer monographs are published, and international publishers are increasing pressure to extend the geographic reach of the books they commission so that they can be sold worldwide. Related to this tightening of distribution are the new information and communication technologies. Digital technologies are changing the ways social scientists work. They allow for new questions and new ways of storing, searching and using materials. They facilitate interaction and cooperation between scholars. However, not all researchers have an equal chance to make use of these opportunities,
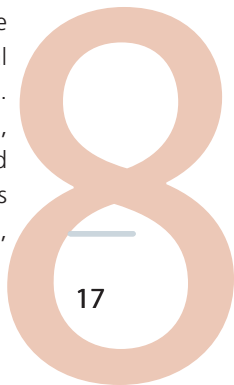
Figure 7 — Unemployment rates of doctoral graduates (selected OECD countries), 2006
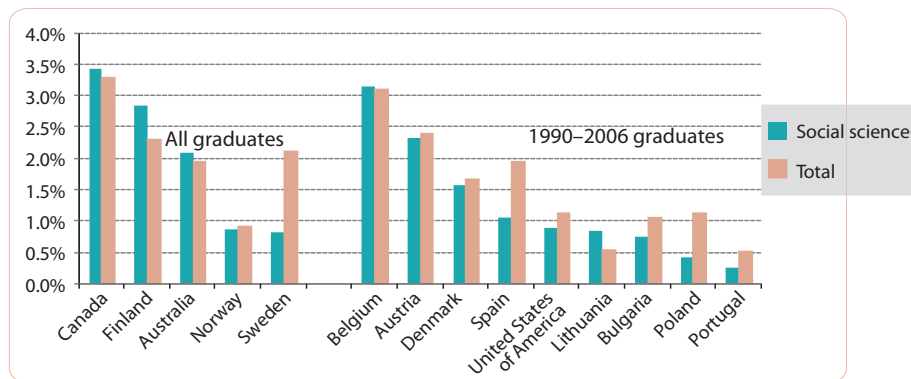
Note: 2005 data for Belgium and Norway; 1987–2005 doctoral graduates and 2005 data for Denmark.
Source: See Auriol in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure 8.2).

Figure 8 — Breakdown of 1990–2006 social science doctorate holders by main sector of employment (selected OECD countries), 2006
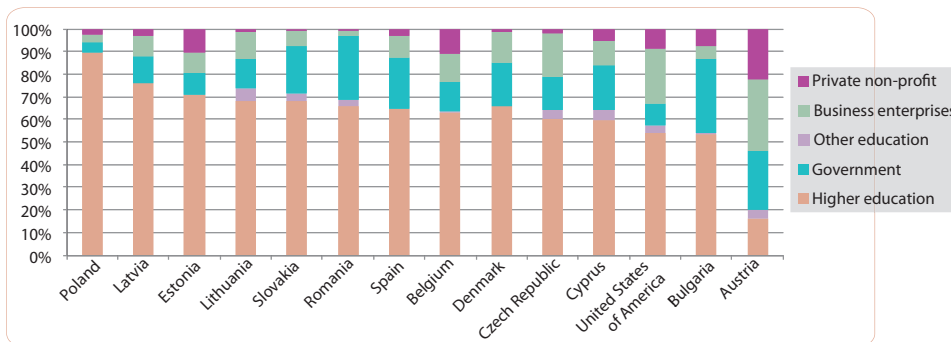
Note: 2005 data for Belgium; 1987–2005 doctoral graduates and 2005 data for Denmark.
Source: See Auriol in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure 8.3).

due to the persistent digital divide between the developed and developing world.

Developments in information and communication technologies are having far-reaching effects on the diffusion and dissemination of the social sciences. Open access can increase access to social science knowledge. Open access journals can diminish the cost of journal subscriptions and increase access to social science knowledge. Many existing social science journals allow authors to pay to give open access to their articles. This can have unintended consequences. Open access models in which authors or their institutions pay for the publication can have negative implications for developing countries and the visibility of their social scientists' work.

'Academic journals are extremely expensive.
...This effectively means that the least well-endowed universities, those that service the poorest students, do not have access to a quality academic journal base and are unable to deliver quality higher education.' (Habib)

Figure 9 — Geographic distribution of journals indexed to Scopus social sciences, 2009
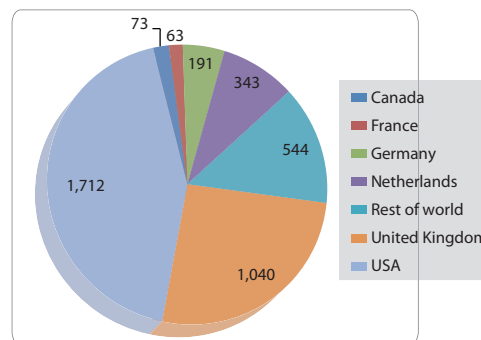
Source: See Kahn in *2010 World Social Science Report* (Figure A1.1).

An interesting development in this context is the growth of open access journal depositories, notably in Latin America. Such portals offer journals the opportunity to increase their visibility. Like Latin American publications, African academic journals are rarely included in international citation indices, a situation that the African Journals Online (AJOL) initiative, which increases the international visibility of African research, aims to change.☺

Chapter 9
Social sciences and policy-makers

Chapter 9 targets relationships between social scientists and policy-makers. It focuses on the differences between scientific rationality and political rationality, in order to determine what social scientists and decision-makers can expect from one another. It also discusses the nature of social sciences produced outside academe, by consultancy firms, organizations, NGOs, think-tanks and government agencies, a topic tackled from another perspective in Chapter 3.

Tense relationships

Relationships between research and policy-making are rarely simple, even though the two have been intertwined for centuries. Argentina's former Minister of Education Juan Carlos Tedesco has strong words for social scientists who are not used to reasoning about the problems policy- makers are faced with. Peter Piot, conversely, deplores the insufficiencies of political action.

Social scientists and decision-makers do not work with the same time perspective, nor do they have the same interests. Scientists and policy-makers should join forces to find solutions to difficulties originating from global challenges.

Evidence-based policy-making

Governments regularly state their interest in evidence-based policy, which adopts priorities and solutions on the basis of credible and relevant research results. Whether knowledge plays a larger part than intuition, political beliefs or conventional wisdom in shaping policy can depend on policy-makers' access to evidence for what works and what does not. Systematic creative experimentation can assist in devising innovative solutions. Several variants of the randomized control experimental approach can be devised to allow the impact of different interventions to be assessed over longer periods and in different contexts.

Statistics are also produced to inform decision-making. Traditionally the production of statistics frames action by the state through the identification and measurement of a 'problem', and through the evaluation of the impact of policies. The growing impact of neoliberal economic policies is transforming the role of national statistics, from privileged tools in state intervention to ex post indicators of performance.

Policy-makers should not expect ready-made knowledge from social scientists. The success of any policy depends partly on its degree of acceptance by the population concerned. The early participation of stakeholders in the research process, and the consultation of the population concerned, can guarantee a greater sense of ownership. Defining acceptable solutions for a population requires close cooperation between science, politics and society.

> *'We must not expect ready-made, just-in-time and ready-to-use knowledge.'* (Nowotny)

Think-tanks

Chapter 9 returns to the issue of research conducted outside universities, in institutions, organizations, brokerage agencies, foundations, consulting firms and polling organizations. Among these institutions, think-tanks have been among

the most discussed in recent years. Their definition varies as do their functions but they developed rapidly in developed countries in the second half of the 20th century. They contribute to the war of ideas, but also to enriching public policy debate. Privately funded, commissioned by a variety of users, they represent a new model of knowledge production oriented towards today's problems. But they can also politicize the production of knowledge and encourage partisanship.☺

Indonesian puppets
© UNESCO

Chapter 10
Conclusions and future lines of action

The Report highlights an extended range of important issues and trends in the organization of social sciences worldwide. It brings together a wealth of new knowledge and data on areas not well covered in the international literature. The final chapter summarizes the Report's main findings, reorganizing them along the two lines of tensions that run throughout the chapters – striking and persistent disparities in research capacity, and knowledge fragmentation – before drawing a number of conclusions.

The conclusions also highlight knowledge gaps and pending issues, and indicate possible directions for future action.

Filling the knowledge gaps on the state of the social sciences worldwide

As a clearer picture of the state of the social sciences emerges, the limits of our knowledge also become evident. The Report stresses how little social science knowledge the social sciences have about themselves. Studies of science, its mechanisms and its effects have always been the concern of social sciences; the time has come for more self-knowledge of the conditions of the social sciences, and how they can be strengthened.

■ More information on the following topics would contribute to a better understanding of how social science knowledge is produced and used in different parts of the world:

• the major themes analysed by social sciences in different regions, and the extent of the internationalization of the research content;

• major changes affecting the institutions on which social science depends, such as the growth of the for-profit sector in research, the expansion in the number of think-tanks and NGOs, and the transformation in institutions supporting scholarly communication;

• the degree of social science's institutionalization in public and private organizations, such as ministries of finance, advertising companies, etc.;

• the penetration of social science terminology, perspectives and theories in the media and public discourse;

• the extent and characteristics of social science teaching at secondary level and the role of the social science textbook industry in legitimizing and transmitting knowledge to new generations of students;

• the effects of language hegemonies, and ways of promoting linguistic diversity to strengthen social science knowledge;

• the prerequisites for research networks to function well, assessing the successes and failures of previous attempts to overcome the capacity divide;

• the impact of digitization and large databases on the nature and type of research produced in different contexts;

■ Data on the number of social science researchers in different countries and over time are not consistent. There are still many gaps in accessible international data on social

10

sciences production, as featured in Annex 1 of the Report. Comparable data on the number of full-time social scientists and students in different disciplines and at different levels; the kind of institutions in which they work; and the amount and source of their research funding would greatly improve our awareness of international trends in the state and production of social sciences.

- Data on the international circulation of social scientists and their ideas are grossly insufficient. On the whole, we know little of the circulation of scientists, and even less of the circulation of social scientists specifically. How many social scientists in the different disciplines are trained in foreign countries? Where do they work? What measures are taken to offer professional positions to those studying and working abroad? How do international networks impact on the circulation of academic personnel and ideas?

Directions for future action

- The Report does not draw blunt policy recommendations: as it outlines several times, problems differ widely from country to country and contexts matter. Suggestions for possible future action are, nevertheless, addressed to international bodies such as UNESCO and the ISSC, to funding agencies at national and international levels, to governments, and to major academic institutions concerned with overcoming knowledge divides. These suggestions are presented in general terms, which should be made specific at regional or national levels.

- The development of research capacity requires that governments, international organizations and aid agencies provide funding to support research institutions as well as individual training. The three levels of capacity – individual, organizational and systemic – all need sustained attention. Funding has to be made available for a sufficient period to produce results. Long-term rather than immediate impact is the objective. To combat the negative aspects of brain drain, programmes enhancing the circulation of ideas and social scientists should be promoted, and include support for diaspora networks.

- There are great disparities in access to knowledge between regions, countries and institutions. Governments, research councils, foundations and funding agencies should provide universities and research institutions with the technology and money needed to support equal access to the most important national and international journals in social sciences. They should also negotiate with major publishing groups to accelerate and extend free and open access to articles published in international peer-reviewed journals. International agencies, regional organizations and national

governments could also increase their support for open access, peer-reviewed journals. African Journals Online (AJOL), and SCIELO, REDALYC and CLACSO in Latin America, can serve as models for the development of similar and broader initiatives.

- New technologies foster a variety of modes of collaboration between social scientists. Open source technologies are likely to play a significant role in the development of research capacity in social sciences. Initiatives aimed at developing new digital tools for research, collaboration and networking in the social sciences will be of critical importance. It is suggested that governments, research councils and consortia of universities cooperate in developing open access archives for the deposit and dissemination of social science studies.

- It is essential to reinforce multilingualism among social scientists, especially those in the global North. One goal is that everyone should be able to work and collaborate in his or her own language while understanding other languages. Translation, data treatment and circulation, and collaborative tools all require specific development. International bodies and organizations may want to consider helping translation policies in social sciences. Studies addressing global challenges from a local perspective should be translated in order to widen the scope of public debate.

- International associations, networks and communities are important for circulating ideas, disseminating knowledge and building capacity. Efforts should be made to strengthen existing structures and develop new ones. Regional and sub-regional networks can contribute to the restructuring of the research landscape along regional lines if they are supported by a variety of public funding agencies, both national and international, as well as by private funders. Different networks are required, with different purposes and memberships. Regional social science networks should be designed to transcend disciplinary, linguistic, gender, generational, regional and ideological divisions. South–South networks supported by private foundations and international organizations could go a long way to reduce disparities in the global academy.

- Competitive project funding is likely to remain a dominant trend in the years to come and has its advantages. But it has disadvantages as well, such as the extremely bureaucratic procedures involved in selection and monitoring processes and, in certain cases, the dominance of short-term funding. Selection and evaluation processes should be kept as simple as possible. In order to ensure diversity, some resources ought to be reserved for innovative projects which fall outside the list of priority topics identified by

Conclusions and future lines of action

funding agencies. Governments should also be aware of the importance of balancing project funding with a strong basis of core funding. Social science research needs a baseline of stable funding. This allows institutions to attract and retain professors and researchers, to offer them an adequate research infrastructure, and to support innovative research.

- Many of the challenges that the social sciences are asked to address require knowledge beyond the confines of single disciplines. At times they encompass the domains of the natural sciences and humanities. It is important to encourage interdisciplinary research and to institutionalize it. It has been suggested that interdisciplinary research centres should be created to improve our understanding of the social aspects of major global challenges such as environmental change. Here researchers from different disciplines could cooperate, and researchers with more than one disciplinary background could be hired. Experimental programmes in which natural scientists are educated in the social sciences and social scientists in the natural sciences would be welcome.

- International digital databases are essential for overcoming knowledge divides between different areas of the world, and for opening up the possibilities of international research. International organizations and various funding should support their development.

- International bodies such as UNESCO, ISSC and OECD, and regional organizations could address the information gaps described above.

More than ever before, social sciences are indispensable to understand today's world and to address effectively present and future global challenges. They are now in charge of solving problems and analysing the situation outside their historical development fields. Due to huge disparities in research capacity and to knowledge fragmentation, they are not in a position to carry out their role to their full potential. The suggestions made in the Report are therefore of vital importance to enable them to address these challenges.⌣

Conclusions and future lines of action

Contents of the Report

2010

World Social Science Report

Over the past twenty years social sciences have become global. They are taught almost everywhere. Their research results are now widely disseminated. Social science expertise is in high demand by policy-makers, media and the public, and social science concepts and theories influence public opinion and debate more than ever before. However the 'knowledge divides' that characterize much of current social science's production, access and use threaten the role of social science expertise and undermine the capacity of policy-makers and civil society to address current challenges.

Worldwide poverty, inequality and climate change are among the current major challenges to which social sciences should contribute a response. More and better social science is vital. To cope, capacity must be built, particularly in the regions where social problems are most acute and social science systems most anemic.

This Report provides a comprehensive review of the state of the social sciences in the world. It:

• analyses some of the most *critical global problems* confronting humanity, as perceived by renowned specialists from different social science disciplines, and highlights the social sciences' potential contribution to their analysis and identification of solutions;

• provides a detailed description of the *organization of social science production in different regions* of the world, with an emphasis on issues confronted;

• reviews the different *factors that contribute to the depletion of national capacities*, including brain drain;

• analyses the *inequalities in knowledge production* that result from major inequalities in capacity across regions and countries;

• reviews the impact of *internationalization of the social sciences*, the homogenization trends as well as possible alternatives to existing hegemonies;

• discusses the *divides and bridges between disciplines*; and identifies new trends in social science themes, methods and disciplines;

• assesses the impact of the recent trends in *assessment and funding* which tend to emphasize competition in social science production;

• analyses the *relationship between social scientists, policy-makers and society at large*;

• makes concrete proposals for tackling the challenges.

This Report has been prepared by the International Social Science Council at the request of UNESCO. It results from the collaboration of high-level specialists from all over the world.

www.unesco.org/publishing

UNESCO
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

**Social and Human
Sciences Sector**

ISSC
International
social
science
council