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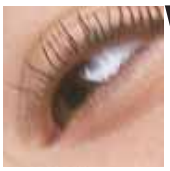
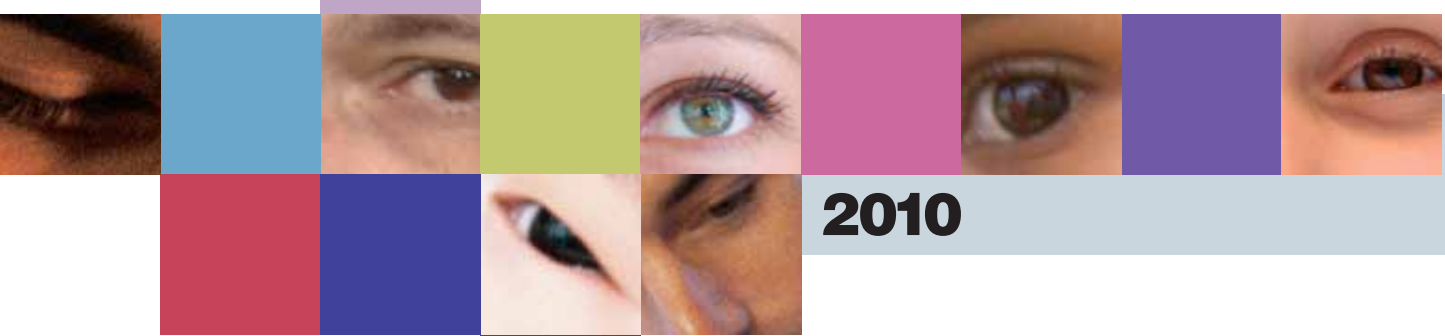


World Social Science Report



2010

Knowledge Divides

World Social Science Report

Knowledge Divides

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Foreword

I welcome the publication of the 2010 *World Social Science Report,* the first thorough overview of this important field in more than a decade. Edited by and co-published with the International Social Science Council (ISSC), it is the product of the active engagement of hundreds of professional social scientists who have contributed their expertise to make this publication a reference.

The Report reaffirms UNESCO's commitment to the social sciences, and our desire to set a new global agenda to promote them as an invaluable tool for the advancement of the internationally agreed development goals. UNESCO, with its emphasis on the management of social transformation, is concerned that the social sciences should be put to use to improve human well-being and to respond to global challenges. As long ago as 1974, UNESCO's General Conference adopted a Recommendation on the Status of Scientific Researchers which emphasized 'the need to apply science and technology in a great variety of specific fields of wider than national concern: namely such vast and complex problems as the preservation of international peace and the elimination of want'.

Today, the social sciences bring greater clarity to our understanding of how human populations interact with one another, and, by extension, with the environment. The ideas and information they generate can therefore make a precious contribution to the formulation of effective policies to shape our world for the greater good.

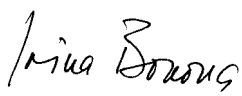
Yet, social scientific knowledge is at risk in the parts of the world where it is most needed. The huge disparities in research capacities across countries and the fragmentation of knowledge hamper the capacity of social sciences to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow. While we may be building a 'knowledge society', it is one that looks very different depending on one's regional perspective. Social scientists produce work of outstanding quality and tremendous practical value, but, as this Report illustrates, social scientific knowledge is often the least developed in those parts of the world where it is most keenly needed – hence this publication's title, 'Knowledge Divides'.

Global divides reproduce themselves in each generation, in our institutions and in our methods of creating and using knowledge. Global divides affect all indicators of human development, hampering the accumulation, transmission and use of knowledge in our societies, to the detriment of equitable development. Consider the world's one billion poorest who live on less than US$1.25 per day. There is a consensus that their lot should urgently be improved but why do well-intentioned policies so often produce so little? We may, perhaps, need better intentions; we certainly need better and more accessible knowledge that can provide policies with the evidence that they need to make a difference.

Social scientific endeavour is also poorer for its bias towards English and English-speaking developed countries. This is a missed opportunity to explore perspectives and paradigms that are embedded in other cultural and linguistic traditions. A more culturally and linguistically diverse approach by the social sciences would be of tremendous value to organizations such as UNESCO in our efforts to foster mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue.

All these findings are profoundly challenging – they emphasize that without conscious and coordinated effort, the drift of the global social science landscape is towards fragmentation, lack of pluralism and estrangement between scientific endeavour and social needs. Clearly, institutions matter hugely for research performance. But their strength can hardly be taken for granted in today's economic circumstances. The production of rigorous, relevant and pluralistic social science knowledge requires international coordination, a long-term vision and a stable environment.

I am confident that this Report will help to galvanize the energies of all of those who are concerned to see the social sciences flourish in the years to come.



Irina Bokova
Director-General of UNESCO

Foreword

By its Constitution, by its programmes, by its whole ethos, UNESCO is committed to the view that knowledge should bring together and unify. The publication of a report entitled 'Knowledge Divides' – which emphasizes the huge disparities in research capacities across countries and the fragmentation of knowledge that hamper the capacity of the social sciences to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow – is therefore at once an opportunity and a challenge. From both perspectives, I take great pleasure in welcoming the 2010 World Social Science Report.

The opportunity, responding to the conclusions of the Report, is to reaffirm our commitment to the importance of the social sciences and to set a new global agenda to promote them. And 'our' is, here, no mere figure of speech. The 2010 *World Social Science Report* is a genuinely collaborative effort. It brings together under one banner the International Social Science Council (ISSC), the primary professional umbrella organization of social science, and UNESCO, an intergovernmental organization with 193 sovereign Member States serving policy communities as a capacity-builder and a broker of scientific knowledge. It builds, furthermore, on the active engagement of hundreds of professional social scientists who have contributed in various ways to its development: as authors, as editorial board members, as reviewers or as participants in the World Social Science Forum successfully convened by the ISSC in Bergen, and organized in cooperation with the University of Bergen and the Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies, Norway, in May 2009.

The very existence of the Report shows that knowledge divides in the social sciences are not insurmountable. Nonetheless, its findings are profoundly challenging. They emphasize that, without conscious and coordinated effort, the drift of the global social science landscape is towards fragmentation, lack of pluralism and estrangement between scientific endeavour and social needs. The production of rigorous, relevant and pluralistic social science knowledge requires a long-term vision and a stable environment. As the findings of the 2010 *World Social Science Report* clearly show, institutions matter hugely for research performance. But their strength can hardly be taken for granted in today's economic and financial circumstances.

As a consequence of fragmentation, we may be building a 'knowledge society', but it is one that looks very different depending on one's regional perspective. Global divides affect all indicators of human development, hampering the accumulation, transmission and use of knowledge in our societies, to the detriment of equitable development. Global divides reproduce themselves in each generation, in our institutions and in our methods of creating and using knowledge.

Consider, for example, those that Paul Collier, in his award-winning 2007 book, called the 'bottom billion' – those living in 'extreme' poverty on less than US$1.25 per day. There is a consensus, in principle, that their lot should urgently be improved. But how should this be done – and why do well-intentioned policies so often produce so little? We may, perhaps, need better intentions; we certainly need better and more accessible knowledge that can provide policies with the evidence that they need to make a difference.

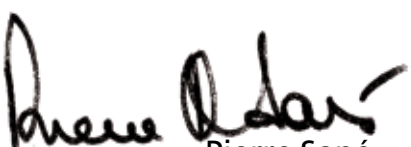
UNESCO, with its ethical mandate, and through its Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme, is concerned that the social sciences should be put to use to improve human well-being, with a view in particular to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and responding to other global challenges, such as the social impacts of climate change. Yet, social scientific knowledge is at risk in the parts of the world where it is most needed because it is neither generated, nor transmitted, nor used. In too many places, even a proper census cannot be carried out.

Another highly significant divide is language. As the 2010 *World Social Science Report* shows, the production and circulation of social science are heavily biased towards English and towards the countries where English is most widely spoken in academic circles. Such linguistic hegemony does not merely create barriers to the participation of those scholars whose English is inadequate for academic communication. It also, and much more importantly, crowds out perspectives and paradigms that are embedded in other linguistic and cultural traditions – thereby impoverishing the social sciences as a whole.

The linguistic question is of great importance from a UNESCO perspective, especially in 2010, the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, for which UNESCO has the lead role within the UN system. The goal of the International Year is to celebrate the world's cultural diversity and help strengthen dialogue among cultures. Ensuring greater linguistic pluralism in international social science will, in this respect, not just strengthen social science. In so far as social science is one aspect of the self-understanding of contemporary societies, linguistic pluralism will also contribute directly to a truly global, and appropriately diverse, self-understanding.

Furthermore, Article 27.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that everyone has the right to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. This is not the best known of the fundamental human rights, but it is not the least important. In so far as social science provides benefits – which are the corollary of the damage bad social science can do, via misguided policies – it is essential and urgent to create the conditions in which they can be truly shared. The knowledge divides identified by the 2010 *World Social Science Report* are barriers to such sharing. They are thus among the key challenges that need to be addressed by the international community, by each state at its own level, and by national and international scientific associations.

As long ago as 1974, the UNESCO General Conference adopted a Recommendation on the Status of Scientific Researchers which, among other things, emphasized 'the need to apply science and technology in a great variety of specific fields of wider than national concern: namely, such vast and complex problems as the preservation of international peace and the elimination of want and other problems which can only be effectively tackled on an international basis'. After more than a third of a century, the world has not lived up to this commitment. It is time to take it seriously, and for that we need social science to take its place in an integrated landscape of science and technology, and policy-makers to listen – among other voices – to what social science has to say. The 2010 *World Social Science Report* makes a welcome and valuable contribution to these crucial tasks.



Pierre Sané
Assistant Director-General for
Social and Human Sciences
UNESCO

Preface

One planet, worlds apart – same map?

A celebration of success

Never before have there been so many social scientists in the world – many more than the 200,000 population of Margaret Mead's famous Samoa. Never before have the social sciences been so influential: economists run ministries of finance, political scientists staff public administrations and MBAs run corporations. Indeed, social scientists have not just entered boardrooms, but since Kinsey also bedrooms. Never before have social scientists had such an impact on public opinion, in terms of both how the world is seen and how it is acted upon. Terms that were once specialized – for example, 'comparative advantage' or 'self-fulfilling prophecy' – dot the media and have entered everyday language. However, in spite of this impact, humans face crises that tax their understanding and their capacity to cope.

Social science: a mixed blessing

Social scientists' foresight has been poor at key junctures, and social science's influence a mixed blessing. Social scientists did not foresee the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which was afterwards prominently interpreted as 'the end of history'[1] – the final victory of constitutional democracy and free markets. As the current economic crisis was unfurling in October 2008, Alan Greenspan, recognized as 'the maestro', and the chair of the US Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006, conceded that his free-market conception of shunning regulation was deficient. 'Yes, I found a flaw', he said in a congressional hearing: 'That is precisely the reason I was shocked because I'd been going for 40 years or more with very considerable evidence that it was working exceptionally well.'[2] His social science map no longer provided guidance. In Malawi, the World Bank has undertaken self-criticism for pushing private markets, opposing government regulation and fertilizer subsidies aimed at promoting cash crops for exports – a policy that resulted in food shortages.[3] More broadly, from Marx and Myrdal to the Washington consensus, development theories have been only modestly successful.

Furthermore, part of the diagnosis of the present global economic predicament is that social scientists were instrumental in constructing – or misconstructing – both the toxic 'financial instruments' and flawed institutions. More than that, social scientists, sometimes for opportunistic reasons, did not understand how their own creation worked or monitor how it unfolded. In short: if it is not good when the social science models of the world are misconstrued, it is even worse when its models for the world lead to misconstruction of the world itself.[4]

A confluence of crises, increasing demand for social science

Notwithstanding these, and no doubt other, problems, the demand for more social science and better social science is likely to increase. This is the result of the state of the world, and more specifically of what could be called 'a confluence of crises': that is, contemporary crises that mutually reinforce one another. The climate is worsening, largely as a result of human activities, and the consequences of this change will be dire for humans. Given modern modes of travel, epidemics can spread faster than at any previous time in human history. Economically, the world faced the worst global crisis since the 1930s in 2008–09. Social conflicts arising from divergent religious worldviews have multiplied. These crises prove that the planet is one indeed, and one commons at that.

The planet is becoming more crowded – more than 2 billion people will be added to the global population over the next 40 years.[5] The world's population is not just growing, it is also greying, with dependency ratios increasing on all

1. Francis Fukuyama, 1992, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press.
2. *New York Times*, 23 October 2008.
3. 'Ending famine, simply by ignoring the experts', *New York Times*, 2 December 2007.
4. See, for example, the commentary by Harvard professor Dani Rodrik, 'Blame the economists, not economics', http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/rodrik29 (accessed 3 March 2010), or the speech by the *Financial Times* chief economics commentator Martin Wolf in November 2008, 'A time for humility', http://blogs.ft.com/economistsforum/2008/11/a-time-for-humility/ (accessed 3 March 2010).
5. See UN Population Division, http://esa.un.org/unpp/p2k0data.asp (accessed 20 September 2009).

continents.[6] The number of poor may also be increasing.[7] Obtaining food is becoming precarious for more millions of people across the globe: the first Millennium Development Goal, the eradicating of extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, may be unattainable.[8] Water resources are becoming scarcer; nearly 900 million people have inadequate access to safe drinking water, while about 2.5 billion have inadequate access to water for sanitation and waste disposal.[9] The crises affect those worst off most adversely.

The net outcome of this confluence of crises is that conflicts, old and new, increase and intensify. They are exacerbated by several factors. One is that the peoples of the world are more tightly coupled in the sense that impacts from one country spread wider, faster and stronger than at any time before in human history. We learned from the present economic crisis that Asian and Latin American countries were not decoupled from the American or European economies or vice versa; rather, impacts cascaded and ricocheted around the world in less than eighty days. We have learned from AIDS, SARS and the H1N1 ('swine') flu virus that no country is an island to itself, and that viruses travel without passports. What happens to a country is increasingly decided outside its own borders. The fact that we live on one planet means that there are no safe havens. Wise responses depend on our understanding of how the world works and how it can be changed.

Social science emerging from the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution

To a great extent, the social sciences grew out of the seventeenth-century European Enlightenment, when new ideas about religion, reason, humanity and society were merged into a fairly coherent worldview that stressed human rights, individualism and constitutionalism. Studies of alien societies were used as a contrast when analysing a country's institutions and customs. A range of new, fundamental conceptions was articulated, for example:

- about the autonomy of the individual and inviolable rights
- about individual freedom and the sovereignty of the people
- about the tripartition of state power and the independence of the state from religious supremacy
- about the unfairness of inherited privileges
- about the principles for organizing a market economy.

Equally basic to the birth of Modernity was the recognition that a plurality of opinions and an open, critical debate were necessary to gain new insights and for citizens to forge their own history. Education for all, including women, was articulated as a political goal. A free press and the dissemination of knowledge were regarded as a means for enlightenment and personal development. Power, it was argued, could only be legitimate if it promoted the welfare of the people. Even today, many of these issues remain contentious.

The development of social theory has accelerated in periods of rapid social change. For example, the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by an intellectual revolution: that is, a fundamental change in the thinking about how the economy works and what the guiding principles for economic policy should be. A key part of the analysis focused on the divergence between, on the one hand, the increase in the output and wealth of nations, and on the other, the effects of competition on the conditions of workers; that is, the impact of unfettered capitalism on social dislocation and the misery of labourers, including women and children. This story about the changing interrelationship between industrial production and social conditions is not history. It is an unfolding story of life on the globe, now called globalization, which signifies an ever more unfettered flow of goods, monies, peoples and ideas. Globalization has been justified and accelerated by social theories, but in turn, it challenges social sciences' current understanding of the continuing processes.[10]

6. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2002), *World Population Ageing: 1950–2050*; http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldageing19502050/ http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldageing19502050/
7. 'World Bank poverty figures: what do they mean', http://www.stwr.org/globalization/world-bank-poverty-figures-what-do-they-mean.html (accessed 3 March 2010). In 2009, an estimated 55 million to 90 million more people will be living in extreme poverty than anticipated before the crisis. See http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/PR_Global_MDG09_EN.pdf (accessed 3 March 2010).
8. According to FAO's *Hunger Report 2008*, another 40 million people have been pushed into hunger in 2008, bringing the overall number of undernourished people in the world to 963 million, compared with 923 million in 2007, http://km.fao.org/fsn/news-events0/fsn-detail/en/news/8903/icode/ (accessed 3 March 2010).
9. WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (2008), Progress in Drinking-water and Sanitation: special focus on sanitation (MDG Assessment Report 2008), p. 25; Updated Numbers: WHO-UNICEF JMP Report 2008.
10. Three examples are Francis Fukuyama (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man,* New York: Free Press; Samuel P. Huntington (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* New York, Simon & Schuster; and Joseph E. Stiglitz (2002), *Globalization and its Discontents,* New York: Norton, each of which has generated extensive debate.

Crises are not anticipated

The themes introduced above are not new, but are still topical. They have been addressed and analysed for two centuries; rethinking them today is, however, timely and pertinent. They concern all the social sciences, since not just national economies are changing, but also ethnic boundaries, institutional arrangements, cultural habits and individual mindsets. In other words, living on one planet integrated by advancing technologies, expanding exchange and real-time communication means a mismatch between globalization and governance; that is, between the reach and adversity of impacts and the range and ability of existing institutions to deal with them. Few people anticipated the present confluence of crises. The question is whether we did not see it coming because we used the wrong spectacles, or simply because we never looked properly, even after the first whistles were blown. There is also considerable professional disagreement on what is to be done, on effective remedies and the impacts these may have on what will happen in the near or distant future. Social scientists clash on many of these crucial questions.

The state of the art: what should be the ambition?

In many ways, the social sciences themselves are fragmented. Indeed, some argue that the disciplines are in disorder, that there is not one 'social science' but many; rather than one paradigm, there are competing schools. This is a problem because we are increasingly made aware that while we live on one planet, we belong to worlds apart. And if the social sciences are not even on the same map, what should be done? Does a more integrated world require a more integrated social science?

Several attempts at Grand Theory have been challenged or have disintegrated: for example, Marxism, structural functionalism, also socio-biology and the neoclassical synthesis. Should we retain this (grand-theoretical) ambition? Is there one social science or many? Should we strive for what physicists call 'a theory of everything'? Can there be a single encompassing theory of all human behaviour? What is our situation now – what theories do we have to start with?

First of all, we have no single, generally accepted model of humanity.[11] We can draw on a wide range of such models, from the Freudian conception to 'administrative man',[12] and increasingly the less calculating, less predictable and partly irrational relatives of 'rational man'. As the faith in simple rational actor models has been shattered, a series of half-breeds has been developed, a whole bestiary of model actors with engaging stories about the properties they are supposed to embody. Some of the most interesting ones have been developed in cognitive psychology and behavioural economics.[13] Amartya Sen, for one, has advised us to set aside a one-dimensional approach to human identity, which results in the 'civilizational and religious partitioning of the world', and adopt a multiplex conception.[14] Is such a conception more appropriate in modern societies which function as mixing vessels for the reassortment of partial identities from different cultures and epochs?

Not only have the social sciences produced a wide range of 'humanoids' – that is, theoretical constructs that are our lookalikes – there is also a wide range of mechanisms at our disposal. These mechanisms range from self-fulfilling prophecies to prisoners' dilemmas, from cobweb models to selection models, all useful for interpreting and explicating different actual situations or events. Should our goal be to identify such mechanisms, explicate their logic and then eclectically use and combine them to explain why different social processes unfold as they do? Should our goal, as Robert Merton had it, be 'theories of the middle range'[15] rather than Grand Theory? Or, as James S. Coleman argued, should we search for 'sometimes true theories'[16] that are useful for interpreting and illuminating different specific phenomena, rather than strive for a Theory of Everything? In general, these and other issues and questions press on social science.

11. The term was coined by Herbert Simon (1957) *Models of Man, Social and Rational: Mathematical Essays on Rational Human Behavior in a Social Setting*, New York: Wiley.
12. The term 'administrative man' is also associated with Herbert Simon and his modifications of the classical model or 'rational man', characterized by bounded rationality and 'satisficing'.
13. Among the themes of behavioural economics is the use of rules of thumb, heuristics and cognitive bias rather than rational decisions, the framing of problems, which affects decision making and market inefficiencies. For a popular introduction to some of the topics, see Dan Ariely (2008) *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions,* New York: Harper Collins.
14. Amartya Sen (2006) *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny,* New York: W. W. Norton.
15. Robert K. Merton (1968) 'On the sociological theories of the middle range', in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, enlarged edition, New York: Free Press.
16. James S. Coleman (1964) *Introduction to Mathematical Sociology,* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.

The task: simultaneously addressing the state of the world and the state of the art

What is the moral to be drawn from the state of our art? I would advocate not so much interdisciplinary research as cross-disciplinary or even integrated research: that is, research that in its very design, execution, application and presentation brings together the humanities and the natural and social sciences in joint research projects.

Climate change, and managing disasters and catastrophes, are examples of topics requiring such integrated research. Climate change is the unfolding of the forces of nature triggered by human action. We cannot change the way the forces of nature work, but we can change the ways humans act. This is why integrated research is critical for the destiny of our planet afflicted by climate change: identifying its social causes and mapping its human impacts, calculating costs and advising policies – all well within the purview of social science. Social science must help measure, assess, negotiate and organize, and in the process, help preserve human diversity and culture. The message of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is that the planet itself may be imperilled: that is, that the forces that have been unleashed through energy use or pollution, if not addressed immediately, intelligently and forcefully, may cause irreversible damage to our common global environment.

When I say 'immediately, intelligently and forcefully', I am no longer talking about natural phenomena but about human responses, about social science knowledge and about evidence-based policy making. More than that: it is a plea for integrated research where the humanities and the natural and social sciences jointly address natural phenomena, social processes, institutional design, cultural interpretations, ethical norms and mindsets.

We have to address simultaneously the state of the world and the state of the art, the course of events and our capacity to analyse and cope with them. In order to make social science relevant, pertinent and potent, we as social scientists have to scrutinize our concepts about how society works, and engage in vigorous self-examination of how our approaches fare in order to define common tasks and set a shared agenda. Societies and behaviours are forever changing – partly as a consequence of the models and interpretations of social scientists.

Hence, striving for the likeness of a theory of mechanics or the chemistry of natural phenomena unaffected by how we analyse them would be in vain. However, we can be optimistic with respect to the role that the social sciences can and must play in addressing the state of the world and the confluence of global crises that we face, even if we have to relinquish the ambition of finding an all-encompassing global theory of social behaviour and development.

Indeed, a token of the optimism is this 2010 *World Social Science Report* which UNESCO entrusted the International Social Science Council to produce. The ISSC is grateful for this challenge and the opportunity it provided for continued close collaboration with UNESCO.

Gudmund Hernes

President, International Social Science Council

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David E. Apter passed away on 4 May, before what was possibly his last piece of writing came out in the present Report. He was a scholar who truly transcended several social science disciplines. In addition to his article, he provided support and insightful comments throughout the preparation of the Report.

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