

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.



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