

General introduction

In 1999, UNESCO published the first *World Social Science Report*. Ten years later, UNESCO asked the International Social Science Council (ISSC) to prepare this second edition, which is published in 2010. The main goal of this new Report is to present an overview of the social sciences in the different areas of the world.

Today's fast-changing global reality presents new challenges to social sciences, and this Report addresses their capacity to respond to them. Since the first Report, social science has expanded fast and become globalized. Social sciences are now produced and taught almost everywhere in the world. Yet their production, their reach and their use are still marked by disparities and fragmentation. This publication analyses these divides and the extent to which they undermine the ability to address challenges which have themselves become global. It takes stock of worldwide developments in social science over the first decade of the twenty-first century and focuses on the knowledge divides that affect them.

Growth or crisis for the social sciences?

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, social sciences are taught in most if not all universities. The number of social science students, lecturers, professors and researchers has increased rapidly, as has the number of books and articles produced in different languages. As a result of this production, a large number of social scientists work not only as scholars and researchers, but also as experts in national public administrations; they advise their governments and sometimes steer the development of their economies. Advances in information technology allow social scientists to communicate more often and more quickly, among themselves as well as with civil society. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, social sciences expertise remains in high demand from policy-makers, media and the public. Social scientists have knowledge and skills that are needed to identify, analyse and decipher structures and changes in society, as well as the seeds of future change. Much is expected from social sciences knowledge and expertise when seeking to solve challenges such as, to name just a few, poverty, climate change and the food crisis.

With the success and growth of social science come criticisms. Every discipline seems to be accused of major misdeeds. Economists are often blamed for being too engrossed in abstract, sophisticated models and for losing sight of social reality. Too confident in the value of the market, they did not warn against poor financial practices and did not foresee, much less prevent, the biggest financial and economic crisis of the present globalized era. Political scientists are sometimes accused of not anticipating deep changes in opinion in society, of not foreseeing election results correctly, or of being compromised by contact with the polling industry. Sociologists are blamed for failing to identify major social trends, or for doing so too slowly. More generally, social sciences have been going through a crisis of recognition and through broad epistemological debates for several decades.

While decision-makers and society in general would require more input from social sciences to solve global and local problems, some social scientists prefer distanced analysis and critical observation, and refrain from engaging in action. Some are blamed for over-specializing, developing theoretical models and addressing only academic discourse. Others are accused of being too local and of not theorizing enough, thus losing global relevance. These tensions have animated debates among social scientists for many years, but have become more acute following recent changes in the overall context of social sciences.

Recent changes in the social environment of the social sciences

Three changes in the environment of social science production are particularly likely to affect their content, role and function. These are first, globalization, leading to the parallel internationalization of some public concerns and of social science research itself; second, changes in the institutional and social organization of social sciences; and third, the increased role of new information technology (IT) in the production and dissemination of social sciences.

Economic and financial globalization is not a recent phenomenon. But its effects on people's lives have

become more obvious. They include increased inequalities between and within countries, between and within regions of the world, and between those who have access to knowledge and those who do not. A much less familiar aspect of globalization is the internationalization of higher education and research, including social science research. Some issues that used to be analysed at national level have become global concerns. The mobilization of the international community in the fight against poverty around the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the issue of water and food security, and recent debates and mobilization over climate change and sustainable development are all cases in point. The internationalization of social science research, and its mobilization in connection with global issues, is likely to influence both the type of research done, which will become more interdisciplinary, and the choice of research themes in different parts of the world.

Rapid changes in the mode of production of social science research are also likely to influence its content and function. In most regions of the world, these disciplines were – and still are – developed in universities and rely mostly on public funds. Pressure to limit or reduce public expenditures, which is a consequence of economic globalization and of the neoliberal paradigm that dominated economic thinking throughout the period under review; the pressure for more diversified sources of funding; the increased use of managerial tools in the management of research systems; and the increased production of knowledge outside universities, are all changes in the organization of social sciences whose impact on content, quality and relevance needs to be assessed.

New technologies and digital tools constitute a third type of change. They allow new questions to be raised, and encourage new and larger forms of collaboration. They radically change the ways in which materials can be found, displayed and analysed. They facilitate the construction of databases and broaden access to them. Information technologies and new collaborative tools are evolving rapidly. If it is impossible to predict where this road leads, preliminary assessments are possible.

As a first literature review has suggested, very little is known about the three changes mentioned above and how they have affected social sciences. Yet social scientists are well aware that ideas, methods and data are never completely independent of their mode of production and of the form of their social environment. One of the objectives of this Report is to address these gaps and contribute to a better understanding of the current dynamics of the social sciences worldwide, their geography, and the institutional, material and social structures of their production and circulation.

The 1999 *World Social Science Report* paid considerable attention to the history and prospects of social sciences, to intellectual trends in their contents and organization, and to their methods and data. This 2010 Report focuses more on organizational and institutional aspects of the production, dissemination and use of knowledge. The reasons for such a focus – which was approved by the WSSR Editorial Board in its first meeting – are:

- Many of the intellectual trends and debates outlined in the 1999 Report are still structuring social science disciplines today.
- A comprehensive review of disciplinary trends worldwide goes well beyond the scope of one single report, assuming it is possible to carry out such an exercise at all. Such an exercise is very difficult to carry out without a huge international and interdisciplinary research team. The explosion of social sciences fields and subfields, the exponential increase in themes, objects and methods, the varying definition of social sciences, and the fact that much social science research produced in local languages remains largely invisible, all complicate this task.
- As mentioned above, it is widely accepted among social scientists that ideas and concepts are highly dependent on institutional and historical context.

The 2010 Report does not neglect the intellectual and substantive dimensions of the social sciences nevertheless. It limits itself to a few aspects: boundaries between disciplines, subdisciplines and epistemic

communities; and tensions between hegemonic ideas, methods and problems and counter-hegemonic currents of social science research. The Report analyses the dynamics of the divisions and connections between researchers, and how they affect the quality and relevance of social sciences.

The theme: knowledge divides

A divide is generally defined as the distance and the depth of the division between two units. Divides will be analysed in the following chapters on the assumption that they reduce the ability of social sciences to analyse social reality and address global problems. Yet although social sciences have divisions, not all divisions are problematic. Some are produced by well-known social processes, such as the division of labour. The Report investigates when divisions, diversities or asymmetries undermine the strength, quality or efficiency of social sciences.

For any observer of social sciences worldwide, the most striking divide is between countries and regions. There is not much in common between a social science department in a well-endowed university of the global North and a social science research institute in a Southern country suffering from economic and political instability. Underlying this regional divide are many other divides, such as the capacity divide between countries that have large number of researchers, well-functioning institutions and research systems, and other countries that do not. Unequal production and asymmetries in international visibility are other aspects of this regional divide. The linguistic dimension is closely connected to the regional divide in a world where English journals and bibliographical databases dominate and possibly dictate the hierarchy of research agendas.

From an epistemological point of view, social sciences have been diverse and are characterized by a multiplicity of methods, approaches, disciplines, paradigms, national traditions and underlying political and social philosophies. To many, this diversity is an asset and not a divide. To others it is a liability because it prevents the social sciences from addressing burning

issues effectively. The extent to which this is the case is discussed in the Report.

Other divides concern access to knowledge, including databases, books and academic journals. The production of social science knowledge in recent years has been marked by increased competition between institutions and between researchers, as a result of ranking and of increasingly quantitative methods of evaluation and project funding. The Report discusses whether these trends result in improved quality and relevance for social science.

Defining the social sciences

The Report analyses all social sciences, calling upon specialists in different disciplines, but without entering into the specifics of the recent intellectual or institutional changes in each discipline. A constant debate in the social sciences concerns the boundaries of social science. This debate has found different regional, epistemological and historical answers. For historical reasons, the social sciences are often defined as the disciplines that are in between the humanities and the natural sciences. As a result, the decision on which disciplines are parts of social sciences and which are not varies a great deal from one country to another and over time. In some countries education is considered part of social sciences, in others it is not. In some countries history is part of social sciences; in others it is part of the humanities. Some countries – and consequently some authors in the Report – do not include professional fields such as business and management; others do.

We have adopted a pragmatic and institutional approach to the problem of defining social sciences. In this Report we have considered as social sciences all the disciplines whose professional association is part of ISSC. Consequently we have tried to involve as many representatives of different disciplines as possible. Authors used different disciplinary definitions, which often correspond to those used in their country. When providing statistics, a number of authors are unable to separate social sciences from humanities, and therefore they discuss trends concerning both. When comparing

statistics from one article to another or from one country to another, the reader should keep in mind that various definitions are used. Where education, legal studies, business and management are included in social sciences, the proportion of social science students, professors and researchers in the overall figure will be larger than for a country which uses a more restrictive definition. In order to clarify the issue and to allow more comparisons, we decided to produce statistical tables on the production of social sciences in major countries. These statistics appear in Annex 1. The author of the Annex, who worked in collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and OECD, explains the difficulties in obtaining reliable statistics and the issues that result from problems of categorization and international comparison. This is a first and major endeavour, even though data is still missing for a large number of countries. We hope that this data will be improved in subsequent reports.

Production of the Report

An Editorial Board composed of renowned scholars of different disciplinary and geographic origins advised the editorial team on the content, format and structure of this Report. The Board met twice during the production of the Report, followed its progress and approved its conclusions and recommendations.

After a preliminary analysis of the literature on the current trends in the social sciences and on recent contextual changes affecting their production and diffusion, we produced a list of issues to be covered and a tentative outline. This early process led to an international call for papers. This call was advertised in a variety of social science research networks, in regional associations of social sciences, among ISSC members and on the ISSC websites. Several hundred proposals reached the editorial team. Proposals were then selected on the basis of their quality and relevance to the outline. While doing so, attention was paid to the geographical, gender and disciplinary distribution of authors. One concern has always been to ensure that researchers from all parts of the world, and from the various disciplines of the social sciences, have a voice.

In addition, selected papers on the state of social science in different regions, and the Annex on basic statistics on the production of social sciences, were commissioned. Institutional partners of ISSC have been invited to contribute to special sections, such as those on major trends and issues in social sciences by region. Several keynote speakers at the ISSC World Social Science Forum, which took place in Bergen, Norway, in May 2009, were also asked to contribute a paper. On the basis of literature surveys, a small series of additional authors were invited to contribute a paper. This process led to the large number of papers included in the Report – more than 80. Yet not all regions, nor all themes that were intended to be included, are covered in the present Report. Some of the gaps have been filled by the editorial team preparing short articles, but most gaps will have to be addressed in future Reports.

Structure of the Report

This Report is primarily addressed to policy-makers, to agencies financing and evaluating social science research in different countries (for example research councils), international organizations and development agencies concerned with social issues, and social science research associations. It should also interest academic institutions and researchers, as well as the many civil society users of social sciences such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media.

The Report starts with an analysis of some global problems as perceived by renowned specialists from different social science disciplines (Chapter 1). In this chapter, the regional councils of social sciences also give their views on the major trends and issues in social sciences in their different regions. Chapter 2 focuses on the institutional geography of social sciences. It provides a detailed description of the state of social sciences in nine different regions of the world, with an emphasis on organizational aspects of social science research. Chapter 3 analyses the inequalities in knowledge production that result from major inequalities in capacity across regions and countries. The two following chapters analyse the effect of the internationalization of social sciences. Chapter

4 illustrates the extent to which some countries are more 'central' than others to the production and dissemination of social sciences, while Chapter 5 discusses the impact of such inequality on the content of social science knowledge and the plurality (or lack of it) in their production.

Chapter 6 looks at issues arising from present divisions between social science disciplines, fields and subfields, as well as the division between the social and natural sciences. It discusses the problem of interdisciplinarity already discussed by the 1996 International Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of Social Sciences.

Chapter 7 continues this theme by discussing divisions that may emerge from growing competition in higher education and research due to the application of new management methods. The two following chapters analyse the divisions and interactions between social science and society, reviewing in particular the various forms of knowledge dissemination (Chapter 8) and the sometimes tense interactions between social sciences and decision-makers (Chapter 9). The last chapter outlines the main conclusions of the Report and identifies future lines of action (Chapter 10).

Each chapter contains several articles produced by different authors. These have been regrouped in sections. Each chapter and section starts with an introduction that summarizes the major issues raised.

A bibliography and list of references is to be found at the end of each chapter. Due to the large number of articles presented, the size of each has had to be limited. A longer version of some articles, or a longer bibliography, will be found on the ISSC and UNESCO websites. When this is the case, it is indicated by a specific sign in the margin. A few papers were presented at the World Social Science Forum in Bergen, and an audio version of their presentation is also available on the web. This is also signalled in the Report with a sign.



This report is a unique collection of information on the institutional and organizational aspects of social sciences, and on the various divides that characterize their production and use. The articles highlight the enormous but skewed growth in social science production; the large but uneven influence of this production on society and on policy-making; the explosion and comprehensiveness of the themes covered, despite the continued fragmentation of social science knowledge; and the globalization of social sciences, despite the persistence of geographical and knowledge gaps in the social science map. We hope that the Report will prove useful and relevant to different readerships, and that its recommendations will lead to constructive discussions in a wide range of different circles.

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