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**Shifting involvements: rethinking the social, the
human and the natural**

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Rethinking Social Science in Global Context: Histories, Disciplines, Policies

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Introduction

The social sciences are more urgently needed, of higher potential societal relevance and more crucial to humankind's possibilities of coming to terms with its global interconnectedness in both economic, cultural and resource terms, than ever before.

The new global context cannot be made intelligible without the contributions of the social sciences. Conversely this context offers immense possibilities for advancement and conceptual innovation of the social sciences and the humanities but also for empirical probing and testing on a vastly expanded scale. Yet these potentials are unlikely to be realized unless institutional initiatives are taken on a transnational scale. Thus, there are urgent needs for vital research capacities and environments to allow humankind to grasp and master current global transformations in the context of the rise of new economic, cultural and scientific centres but also of a landscape where deep knowledge divides persist.

In order to release these potentials, however, intellectual and institutional dilemmas and constraints have to be addressed. *Firstly*, the social sciences must be understood in terms of their long-term trajectories and legacies. *Secondly*, the social sciences face more significant shifts in their epistemic ordering and in their relationships to other forms of knowledge both in the public sphere and in the humanities and the natural sciences than at any point in time during the past century. *Thirdly*, in the course of recent decades, pervasive changes have occurred in institutional contexts, in public policies for the social sciences, and in practices to safeguard accountability and assessment. Many, if not most, of these changes have been proposed and implemented with little or no attention to the new global context of the social sciences and to the need of overcoming the deep knowledge divides that still characterize this context.

Jointly these three sets of dilemmas and transformations entail that in order to release the potentials of the social sciences, it is necessary to move beyond an earlier tradition of what might be termed academic diplomacy. Instead a set of measures are needed that specifically aim at strengthening high-quality social science research across national boundaries and across existing knowledge divides.ⁱ

1. Rethinking the History of Social Science

1.1 The Rise of the Social Sciences: From Moral and Political Philosophy to Social Science

In a long-term perspective the social sciences constitute particular forms of human self-reflexivity characteristic of what might broadly be termed the age of modernity. In the course of the past two and a half millennia other forms of such reflexivity have prevailed. This is true of those types of moral and political philosophy that emerged in China in the times of Confucius and Mencius as well as of classical Greek philosophy and, later, of the tradition of Roman law. It is also true of thoughts about appropriate forms of governance and statehood that have been associated with the development of the great world religions. Early modern Europe saw the emergence of a plethora of forms of thought about human existence in civil, as opposed to divine and natural, society.ⁱⁱ

The absolutistic states, which came to predominate in Europe and in much of the rest of the old world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often took care to create detailed records of their various forms of wealth, including their own populations, to serve as a basis for measures designed to accumulate such wealth. In the European context this is true of early forms of political arithmetic and economic thought, including mercantilism, as well as the so-called cameral and policy sciences.

In the context of the Qing Dynasty, the Tokugawa shogunate, as well as in that of the three coterminous Islamic empires, ranging from South-eastern Europe over the Middle East to Central and South Asia,

namely those of the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Moguls, other orderings of knowledge developed. Sometimes the result was a complex encounter between different knowledge traditions, but also, as in the Indian case, a resuscitation of long-standing knowledge traditions in a context of rapidly changing global interconnections and impositions, often of a highly asymmetric nature.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is to some extent an arbitrary decision whether the continuities or the ruptures in scholarly and intellectual practices are emphasized. It is, however, clear that the emergence of the social sciences and the humanities as distinct practices is linked, if in intricate and complex ways, to the transformations of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In traditional accounts the emphasis was often on phenomena described by terms such as the Industrial Revolution, the French and the democratic revolutions, and the transformations of public spheres and civil societies.

In this context there occurs a fundamental transition from earlier forms of moral and political philosophy into social science. This transition is also linked to an institutional restructuring not only in forms of political order but also in the forms in which human knowledge is brought forth and in which claims to validity are ascertained. One feature of this institutional transition is the emergence of the public sphere that gradually comes to replace arenas of a more closed nature such as aristocratic literary salons. Another one is the rise of new or reformed public higher education and research institutions that come to replace both the laboratories of wealthy amateurs and the academies under Royal patronage and partial control.

In this sense the social sciences - and indeed the word 'social science' - originated in Europe in the late eighteenth century in a complex process out of where these forms of knowledge emerged but also transcended earlier forms of both record keeping, of manuals of governance practices, and of discourses on matters of moral and political philosophy and of the amelioration of forms of material appropriation, both as they related to agricultural production and to commerce.

The social sciences became vehicles for grasping a situation in which human beings seemed to face new uncertainties, where familiar categories of ways in which humans related to each other, intervened in the world, conceived of their relationships to princely rulers but also to history and to the world large, had to be reconceptualised and where social interactions seemed to take on new dynamics. The social sciences became part of the efforts of humans to understand and to master this new and inherently uncertain world.

From their rise in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries onwards the emergent social sciences had to come to terms with basic problems of conceptualizing links between human beings, forms of agency, of temporality and, in empirical terms, how to proceed to a stock-taking of this new world of change with the help of a rapidly expanding set of judicial, historical and, not least, statistical methods and measures.

Some forms of social science took on the character of a relatively clearly demarcated discipline already relatively early on in the nineteenth century. Thus, already then economics, or rather political economy, became differentiated from moral philosophy. At roughly the same time history emerged as a separate scholarly field with its own canon of rules even if the full disciplinary formation of history is a highly extended process. In the case of political science it is in some countries, Britain being one example, not possible to speak of a clear demarcation of the study of politics from historical-philosophical studies until much later. In the case of sociology the term was already coined in the early nineteenth century. However the classics of sociology of the late nineteenth century, Weber, Durkheim and Pareto, were all broad social science generalists. Their contributions and professional allegiances were intimately related to a range of fields, including the study of politics, economics, education, history and religion, and the term sociology often referred to a broad historical-comparative study of society. However it was a type of study that saw itself as scientific and separate from reform-orientated activities of a more general nature.

1.2 Consolidations of disciplinary and institutional forms

Social science as an institutionalised scholarly activity performed within a series of academic disciplines is by and large a phenomenon of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is a process that directly and indirectly reflects concerns about the wide-ranging effects of the new industrial and urban civilisation that was rapidly changing living and working conditions for ever-larger parts of the population in many European nations during the nineteenth century.

It is also in this period, particularly in the period 1890–1930, that the social sciences acquired a degree of institutionalisation in academic, and to some extent also in political, institutions, which in the period after the Second World War came to be seen as their natural epistemic and institutional ordering.

For much of the twentieth century, academic research took place in the context of what one may call relatively strong statehood, and those states were by and large pronounced supporters of scientific research. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the institutional authority of the states – sometimes recently created, sometimes recently strengthened in reform moves – had become the major organizer of numerous social practices. Among those was very often the development of institutions for research and teaching that were to serve the interests of those states in international competition, both economically and culturally. The social and human sciences, too, even though they were not always in the centre of attention, benefited from such political support and often developed their first firm academic-institutional structures in the form of chairs, disciplines, institutions, associations and, with those, their own forms of evaluation and intellectual reproduction. While often interrupted by the catastrophes of the first half of the twentieth century, such developments resumed and reached a high point during the 1960s and 1970s.

Overall this context was highly supportive of scholarly developments. However, the fact that those developments took place within a political container also entailed severe *constraints*. This is obvious for situations in which the state-institutional authority operated on the basis of political ideologies that pre-shaped the permissible developments of the sciences and clearly of the social and human sciences in particular.

However, the emergence of so-called national traditions of scholarship in many disciplines demonstrates the existence of boundaries of scholarly reasoning that could not easily be transcended in contexts of relatively liberal statehood either. This phenomenon is largely the result of the combination of national institutional structures with the idea that national societies are also the communities of interpretation that give significance to those ‘facts’ observable by research in the social sciences and humanities. Furthermore, scholarly communities were mostly both small and highly stratified during this period, permitting very few scholars to take the role of gate-keepers defining the national intellectual field and marginalizing dissenting voices.

The most typical academic creation of this period is the scholarly discipline, gathering associations, journals, denominations of chairs and teaching units, and sometimes research programmes in one institutional structure that was often loosely knit but nevertheless provided orientations for research and intellectual exchange. While there were some early formative developments, in particular in the natural sciences, the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s witnessed the formation and consolidation of a wide array of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities.^{iv}

The basic self-understandings varied highly, reaching from a view of science that would emulate the natural sciences to one that insisted on the specificity of the sciences of human social life and its need for contextual interpretation and understanding. Often, there was lively internal debate within a single discipline, but some disciplines, such as economics, were more strongly oriented at the former model, and others, such as history and anthropology, at the latter. In many cases, there was also cross-national variation. Anthropology, for instance, developed highly nation-specific outlooks, and a scholar from one country could often not recognize scholars from another country as working in the same field.

Despite such variety though, the disciplinary structure consolidated in the course of the twentieth century, aided considerably by international efforts to generalize this disciplinary model of academic

organization after the Second World War, promoted by UNESCO in particular. Most significantly, the discipline made it possible to elaborate an organizational form for the practice of scholarly autonomy. This latter idea had been widely debated over a long time and became formally accepted in the course of the twentieth century, but it needed a feasible way of being implemented. The concept of peer review provided such a way, defining peers as those who were recognized members of the same discipline. From the 1960s onwards this ordering has become diffused on a truly global scale. As such it has been highly successful. This global diffusion has led to both a strengthening of international professional associations and to an intellectual enrichment of the disciplines themselves. However we now witness a questioning and deep-seated *destructuring* of key features of this ordering.

1.3 Recent history: Reconfigurations and destructuring

The current transformations have prompted some observers to speak of a transition from a discipline – to problem – and user-orientated forms of practice. Others have spoken of the end of academic research.^v In any case, nobody can credibly propose recommendations for the future of the social sciences and the humanities without taking a close look at the recent history of these practices.

The past few decades have been marked by pervasive processes on the levels of policies, institutions and disciplinary forms that have contributed to deep-seated shifts in the social sciences and in the traditional contexts of universities in terms of modes of evaluation, distribution of recognition, thematic priorities, and theoretical orientations. This holds on a global scale although there are of course significant differences in the form it takes in different national contexts as well as in elite institutions as opposed to more precariously funded institutions. The general trend however affects countries of the European Research Area as well as of North and South America, of the states of former Soviet socialism and of the People's Republic of China and other countries of East Asia.

One aspect of the current process of destructuring consists precisely in a questioning of the disciplinary model of intellectual and institutional ordering. Even a glance at the history of the social and human sciences should, however, suffice to make clear that the terms of this debate are in need of reformulation. Generally speaking the full-scale consolidation and demarcation of disciplines in the social and human sciences is a much more recent phenomenon than proponents of this model tend to acknowledge. Similarly the rationales behind such demarcation are to a much larger extent the result of pragmatic and professional contestations than is normally admitted.

Conversely, however, the proponents of new modes of production of social knowledge or of a post-disciplinary university often posit an evolutionary shift from more or less untouched, discipline specific forms of knowledge to much more user- and policy-orientated forms of knowledge that exhibit non- or post-disciplinary features. Historically, however, developments have rather tended to be in the opposite direction, i.e. some engagements with societal problems have, if unevenly and at first in some contexts, been institutionalized in a setting, often but not always in a university, that permits some degree of institutional autonomy and the elaboration of research problems independent of immediate policy or customer demands.

What seems to be called for in the present context is rather a realization of the real need for a degree of intellectual and institutional autonomy but also of the need for a much stronger encouragement of boundary crossings within these spheres of relative autonomy.

Put somewhat differently, scholars in the social sciences and the humanities have, perhaps because of the recent and sometimes precarious position of their scholarly practices, often asserted the disciplinary specificities more strongly than scholars from the natural, medical and technological sciences who seem less hesitant than their colleagues in the social and human sciences to pursue cutting-edge research, whether or not it can in the end be neatly contained within an existing disciplinary boundary. It has however become increasingly clear that many leading social and human scientists have come to behave in a similar way and for similar reasons of a mixture of practical and theory-driven concerns. In the final section of this contribution to the World Social Science Report some of these reasons and their institutional implications will be further explored.

2. Shifting Involvements: Rethinking the Social, the Human and the Natural

From their inception as distinctive forms of knowledge, the social sciences have been involved in, drawn on or demarcated themselves from alternative and sometimes competing forms of knowledge. Philosophical, historical, judicial and literary forms of discourse, but also fields such as medicine, biology, genetics, neuroscience and even physics, have at times exerted a profound influence on the social sciences. In historical perspective, the social sciences to a large extent emerged out of pre-disciplinary forms of what in the course of the nineteenth century came to be thought of as humanities. This is particularly true of the relationship of the political, sociological and economic sciences in relationship to the broad eighteenth century genre of moral and political philosophy. Currently, however, many of the demarcations that became accepted and academically entrenched in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are once again open to questioning and critique.

2.1 The triple legacy of the humanities

With a rough, but still generally correct, simplification, it might be stated that the humanities, as we know them in the contemporary university landscape, have developed in the course of the last two centuries in response to three broad types of engagements.

Firstly, there was the persistent effort in a European context to articulate the heritage of the Greek and Roman antiquity in linguistic, historical and philosophical terms. This heritage has ever since the neo-humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries been interpreted in universalistic terms. Developments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries entailed not only the rebirth of the idea of the university in the German lands under the influence of idealistic philosophy, it also involved a reassertion of the universalism of the classical heritage.

At roughly the same time analogous forms of articulating learned traditions occurred in other parts of the world, but by and large they were much more similar to European developments prior to the rise of disciplinary and university-based humanistic scholarship than to that of the period after the turn of the eighteenth century. This is for instance true of the flowering of Sanskrit knowledge from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth centuries.

Secondly, and parallel to this development, there is throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries another key concern that contributes to the shaping of the humanities, namely the articulation of different national traditions in linguistic, ethnic and historical terms. The evolution of the humanistic disciplines in their modern form is intimately linked to these developments and to the various nation state projects. This is true of their role in institutions of higher education both also in terms of the construction of national museums, the preservation of folklore and the search for archaeological and ethnographic traces of national traditions.

Thirdly, the encounter between European nations and extra-European ethnic groups and spaces exerted an important influence on the humanities in this period. This was most clearly the case for anthropological and ethnographic research but also for the study of languages and cultures more generally.

Throughout most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these different strands of inspiration for the humanities developed in mutual interaction and often unresolved tensions.

The traumatic events of the middle of the twentieth century force a reappraisal in this respect in most European countries with a variety of outcomes. This was perhaps most clearly so in Germany, where the historical, literary and philosophical sciences had been intimately linked to the project of constituting identity and nation. The conflation of this legacy with the practices of Nazi Germany ushered in, to quote the title of a book published immediately after the Second World War by one of the most famous German historians of the twentieth century, *The German Catastrophe*. Thus a profound rethinking, the recognition of being in the Hour Zero, became unavoidable.

In most other countries the humanities could point to a more mixed record. Parts of them had often served a role of raising a spirit of resistance and national independence during occupation and war. Simultaneously, other elements had become involved in projects of delimiting national traditions in strong juxtaposition towards others. Others still were, if in vastly different ways, linked to colonial practices that became ever more questioned in the course of the post-Second World War years.

In all European countries, there also emerged a general trend towards a weakened role for the humanities relative both to the technical, natural and medical sciences but also relative to the new social sciences which for the first time also in institutional terms tended to constitute themselves as separate from the humanities within academic settings.

Mass migrations, increasingly global economic interactions and the realization that the pronouncements of the arrival of purely secular society may have been premature have, if belatedly, called attention to the short-sightedness of the relative neglect of the humanities. The humanities are more urgently needed than ever. Yet the basic choice of policies for the humanities tends to be cast either in technocratic terms, i.e. in terms which only recognize their contributions to the extent that they may be added on to immediately useful concerns, or else in a call for a return to their past as prominent underpinnings of national culture or national canons.

Throughout the past century the importance of the humanities has tended to be routinely emphasized in statements by leading representatives of the public sphere and the state. Such statements, however, have increasingly failed to translate into budgetary allocations and sustained commitment for support. Analogously, all too often have representatives of the humanities themselves tended to resort to generalized complaints about public neglect.

There is now an urgent need to articulate a new and critically important role for the humanities in the twenty-first century: to provide the resources that may allow for a meaningful dialogue and mutual interactions on a global scale. Precisely those humanistic disciplines, which have sometimes tended to be viewed as superfluous or dismissed as “small” or “orchid” disciplines may be of the greatest significance provided links to the other social and human sciences are clearly spelt out.

2.2 Rethinking relationships between social and natural sciences

The social sciences and the humanities emerged in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries not only out of moral and political philosophy but also in close interaction with discussions about natural phenomena, not least those of botany, medicine and agriculture as well as in dialogue with ideas about the boundary between humans and non-humans. This period of “inventing the human sciences”, to quote the title of a famous book, was one of a fleeting or even non-existent boundary between pursuits that later came to be labelled social and natural science. Once a boundary had been drawn the history of the social sciences and humanities in the course of the last century and a half has come to rest upon an assumption that there exists an easily identifiable boundary between the cultural and the natural sciences. The construction of such a boundary is, however, itself largely a phenomenon of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is also a demarcation that has rarely been fully accepted.

Thus, precisely in the period of disciplinary consolidation of social science in the late nineteenth century there was a profound influence of biological and evolutionary thought upon the social sciences and the humanities. A theoretical component of this influence manifested itself in the use of evolutionary metaphors in the analysis of the history not only of human societies but also of states. Another, more practical and policy-orientated influence consisted in the elaboration of various programmes for the genetic enhancement of human populations. This influence was pervasive and propagated by scholarly proponents across a wide spectrum of political views from the far right to the far left and came to shape significant parts of the history of disciplines such as statistics, demography, criminology, and sociology.

The horrendous experiences of the 1930s and 1940s, but also the gradual realization that policies in European colonies and in settler societies had brought massive violations of the rights of indigenous

populations, brought many of these interactions across the divide between social and natural sciences to a halt. However, it is clear that this boundary is currently being assailed from a variety of quarters. Social scientists and humanistic scholars can in many cases no longer conduct cutting-edge research in their fields without collaborating with natural and medical scientists. Some prominent examples of this are research endeavours in the following areas:

- Studies of the long-term development of languages and linguistic families increasingly depend on collaboration between linguists, historians, archaeologists and geneticists.
- Studies of the human mind and the philosophy of mind and consciousness increasingly involve collaboration between philosophers, psychologists, neurologists, brain researchers as well as researchers in boundary-crossing disciplines such as cognitive science and artificial intelligence.
- There has long existed close collaboration between mathematicians, logicians and computer scientists. This collaboration has now also ramifications for both historians and biologists and constitutes a field which at one and the same time exhibits features of classical humanistic scholarship but also extends to applications-orientated engineering.
- The question, assumed at least provisionally settled already more than two hundred years ago, about the boundary between humans and non-humans, is being reopened by medical and genetic engineering. In practical terms this is one of the sources for the rapid growth of the field of bioethics. However, the questions raised can hardly be contained by relegating them to a relatively small, if ever so competent, group of students of ethics and meta-ethics. They raise basic concerns for all of the social and human sciences.
- Virtually all policy-orientated studies now demand collaboration between social, human and natural scientists. This is glaringly obvious for the whole field of environmental change, including climatic change. It is however also true of most other aspects of public policy where instruments proposed require an understanding not only of man-machine interactions but of the socially embedded role of technologies and of the human limitations to set policy processes in motion, to grasp their effects and to revise beliefs and actions accordingly. The preoccupation with questions of uncertainty and risk is but one expression of these difficulties.
- Dramatic advances in evolutionary biology have increasingly inspired efforts to use analogous methods also for the study of human societies.
- There has occurred a revolution, partly but not exclusively driven by military and security concerns, in methods of surveying and tracking movements of human beings in physical and virtual terms. It is an open question whether this will give rise to a new bifurcation between a security- and surveillance-focused concern on a previously unimaginable scale and an extension of the social and human sciences which take the study of global communication networks and flows as its starting point. Studies in the latter category have already come to constitute one of the most influential forms of global studies and provide surveys that exhibit sensitivity to the reach and impact of new communications networks, yet theorize their observations in terms familiar to the traditions or historical macro-sociology.

Against this background it is necessary to assert the need for collaboration across the divide between the cultural and the natural sciences. However, it is also necessary to once again assert the particular need of the social and human sciences to have their relative independence respected.

Somewhat paradoxically the combination of their relatively small material demands and the great potential significance of their contributions, seems to make it all the more important that a strong element of critical and historical self-reflection be preserved in the most prominent sites of such research. Such an element has historically been located in leading research universities and to some extent also in institutes for advanced study and centres of excellence, such as Max-Planck-Institutes. However, this state of affairs cannot be taken for granted.

It is a great challenge for the future to maintain and strengthen intellectual sites in research and academic landscapes which are both open to cooperation across the divide between the cultural and the natural sciences and yet characterized by a measure of organized scepticism against proposals that

entail that the social and human sciences should rapidly abandon core elements of their own theoretical traditions.

2.3 Rethinking knowledge divides: Centres and peripheries

Human activities are characterized by varying degrees of inequality and asymmetry. Some human beings have greater access to resources than others, have lower transaction costs, more social reputation or political influence. Spatially we can distinguish between centres and peripheries in terms of concentrations and movements of people, capital and other resources.

Geographers have long since developed time-space geography as a means to conceptually capture such movements. Similarly historical sociologists have depicted the long-term developments of the entire world in systemic terms where relationships between centre and periphery constitute core elements of a world system in a particular epoch. World systems theory has also served as the backdrop for the writing of histories of social science on a global scale.

Analogously, other historical sociologists, most notably perhaps Randall Collins in a magisterial study of the history of philosophy across times and civilizations, have combined macro-sociology with a careful analysis of the networks of interaction of individuals and groups of philosophers. Indeed we may state the following: There are at any point in time some centre(s) which can be discerned in terms of concentration of resources and movements of people, capital and other resources. In terms of scientific and scholarly interactions one may, as just mentioned, depict networks based on an analysis of references, acquaintances or even spatial movements. On a global scale such analyses undoubtedly yield interesting and important insights.

One of the pioneers of time-space geography as well as one of the scholars who came to shed new light on analysis of innovation and diffusion was the Swedish cultural geographer Torsten Hägerstrand. Hägerstrand argued that one of the most important roles of truly innovative research is to bring together, within a new conceptual framework, strands of research which have hitherto appeared as separate from each other. It is, this is the metaphor Hägerstrand uses,^{vi} as if suddenly a new window had been opened that allows us to see the world in a new light. We are offered conceptual tools to capture and make meaningful what we see as if it was for the first time, but we are also invited, or urged, to examine new empirical relationships in the world.

Hägerstrand's metaphor and language were of course themselves part of a particular tradition and a particular time and space. However they call attention to crucial aspects of the social and human sciences, namely the following ones:

1. These practices are to some extent constitutive of the way we experience the world and how we may go about to intervene in the world and to try to change it. The social and human sciences do not merely describe, retell and count what is already familiar. They also provide conceptual tools that are genuinely new. They give expression to thoughts that once expressed can no longer be made unthought.
2. This may sound trivial. However even a moment of reflection makes clear that we cannot even imagine a world where the social sciences and the humanities did not exist. Hardly a single public policy is formulated that does not draw on some of their findings. Hardly a market interaction occurs which does not involve at least a tacit reference to some concept which would have appeared quaint and unfamiliar to people a few hundred years ago but which has subsequently slipped into daily language from the intellectual settings in which it was originally formulated and discussed. Hardly a statement in the public sphere, nor indeed the very concept of such a sphere, or the media is formulated which does not involve some reference to findings or concepts from the social and human sciences.
3. This transformative force of the social and human sciences is of great relevance for an assessment of their position and potential contributions on a global scale. Of course, these practices are dependent on public support, on a willingness of governments and of people to

guarantee that some measure of resources are put to their disposal. A number of these practices are also dependent on considerable resources, not least when it comes to large surveys of the populations with a time-dimension. However, on the whole, even the largest social science projects have a relative small degree of dependence on resources and maybe the most important of these resources is a degree of intellectual openness and toleration of thoughts with a potentially far-reaching transformative force.

4. This means that history of culturally reflexive practices, such as the social and human sciences in the age of modernity but also the history of the great world religions in earlier times, may be analyzed in terms of centres and peripheries both in intellectual, institutional and political terms. At any point in time there also exists one or a small number of intellectual centres. However, these centres are not surrounded by an undifferentiated periphery but rather by a series of actual or potential alternative centres. These alternative centres also make it possible for human beings globally to challenge the power of any dominant or hegemonic power in terms of a language and values familiar to the hegemonic power itself.
5. As pointed out by for instance the historical sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt, this has important implications for our understanding of, to use his terminology, the present age of multiple modernities and globalization. In this age, most states may still successfully uphold a monopoly of the use of violence. However, no state, not even a superpower, can uphold a monopoly of interpreting societal realities or of assigning value to its own policies. The social sciences and humanities provide globally accessible interpretive tools which at any point in time makes it possible for contenders and critics to question the interpretations of societal reality and of the legitimacy of policies in the terms articulated by a dominant or hegemonic power itself. Much of scholarly debate but also political debate in the recent decade bears precisely this characteristic.
6. In this respect the social and human sciences are indeed a very important element of global modernity and its tensions and antinomies and, in consequence, also of its potentials to benefit humanity as a whole in ways more commensurate to interests and views of human beings themselves.
7. In institutional terms there can be no doubt that various countries, some university(ies) or some disciplines in some specific country have served as admired models to be emulated. However, such emulations have more often than not been characterized by processes of “creative misunderstanding”, i.e. an effort to realize some imagination rather than a very realistic model.

This was so when leading American academics between the 1870s and 1920s tried to capture the most distinguished features of German science and German universities. It is also largely true when academic leaders in contemporary Europe – or China – try to build institutions aimed at replicating the features of leading American research universities, if not normally with much more limited resources at hand.

8. What obtains in the realm of institutions is even more prominent when it comes to scholarly practices, whether in the form of disciplines, schools or fashions. Debates about “orientalism” and the need to contribute to “provincializing Europe” are but examples of this. As a consequence, the transformative force of the social and human sciences may never have been greater than today but the same is true of the potential for their intellectual vigour and innovative capacity. In consequence, there is a greater need than ever for intellectual sites, where these potentials are articulated and where independent and innovative theoretical work in the social and human sciences is encouraged on the same level as large-scale empirical and policy-orientated studies.

In the third and final section of this contribution, key prerequisites will be highlighted: mechanisms that allow for close and sustained scholarly interaction with regions in the world that are already now emerging as being of great significance not only in terms of economic interactions but also in scholarly and scientific terms.

3. Overcoming Knowledge Divides: Releasing the Potentials of Social Science

The new global context cannot be made intelligible without the contributions of the social sciences. Conversely this context offers immense possibilities for advancement and conceptual innovation of the social sciences and the humanities but also for empirical probing and testing on a vastly expanded scale. Yet these potentials are unlikely to be realized unless institutional initiatives are taken on a transnational scale.

The following section will outline a list of institutional and structural measures that are needed to advance the social and human sciences enough in the new global context of multiple and entangled modernities. These measures are designed so as to involve significant steps towards overcoming global knowledge divides and towards redressing prevailing asymmetries in the conceptual articulation of the conditions of humankind.

The recent destructuring has had a profound impact on research and scholarship and there exists a rather deep disorientation about the mission and purpose of the social sciences and humanities, as is sometimes visible in highly self-critical public debate in disciplines such as history, sociology or anthropology. Obviously, scholarly communities will ultimately need to regain a stronger sense of purpose from within, but research policy needs to support this work.

In order to achieve an understanding of current predicaments of the social sciences, and indeed also of the humanities, it is important to recognize that some of the foundations of former, state-centred research support have withered or even disappeared but along with this also some of the constraints entailed by these forms of support. In the case of the humanities it is, for instance, obvious that the intimate ties between universities, museums and research efforts in articulating and interpreting the particular ethnic traditions associated with a given nation-state appear as less self-evident or outrightly problematic. In the case of the social sciences some of the links between scholarly practices, government agencies and policy-making also appear as more open-ended in the wake of internationalization and globalization processes and with the emergence of new transnational entities, with the European Union as a pre-eminent example, where links between policy processes and research are being reinterpreted or in the process of exploration and search.^{vii}

3.1 The long-term logic of the audit society

One of the most prominent developments in research and higher education policies in the past decades is a strong increase in demands for auditing and accountability. Some of these are of a truly long-term nature, whereas others take their starting points in more recent developments in fields of public management and administration but also in the restructuring of international relations.

Needless to say, one of the most important changes has to do with the emergence of mass higher education systems in regions across the world and in recurring great surges of expansion, in Europe and North America in the 1960s and then again in the 1990s.

Indeed, there has emerged a global audit society for research and higher education. Increasingly and seemingly irreversibly this has taken the form not only of ever larger exercises in information collection and processing but also in new forms of budgetary allocations on the basis of the mastery of a series of proxy variables to measure creativity, often measured by forms of productivity, and quality, often measured by forms of quotations. In the last decade, this process has been intensified and extended to countries across the globe.

There have been several studies that look at long-term implications of these dynamics for different areas of the world. It is clear that even for countries with strong traditions in the social sciences, such as Russia but also other NIS-countries as well as China, many of these measures tend to be significantly less applicable than in a North American or West European setting. In some cases their adoption also seems to risk thwarting traditions and environments which appear to be both intellectually highly valuable and vulnerable.

Still, standardised quantitative measures have become used as a matter of course in recent years and are, across a range of countries, if in different ways, being increasingly tied to decisions about the allocation of resources for research. Advanced standardised techniques for measuring productivity, quality, and impact are inevitable as information sources about developments in the social and human sciences. However, they also inevitably rest on assumptions that it is legitimate to substitute proxy variables – such as productivity in the form of the number of publications for creativity or the number of quotations as a measure of quality and originality.

These measures are valuable in the sense that they establish some of the minimal requirements that funders and users can and must legitimately insist on being satisfied. However, they are not sufficient as evaluation tools for the most promising, significant and original forms of scholarly contributions in the social and human sciences. If resources are not to be misspent on good but unimaginative and suboptimal research efforts, there must be vital and well-articulated forms of high-quality judgements from within the scholarly community.

This is of particular importance for fields of research with relatively small but highly specialized research communities, but also for transnational collaboration involving social and human scientists from the world outside of the Atlantic seaboard, where high quality research exists in a number of the social and human sciences, with publication outlets that leave few traces when now standardized techniques are employed.

This requires the development of more stringent interpretive tools of research assessment of a qualitative nature. There are a large number of examples of such tools being employed in leading North American and European scholarly institutions but they now tend to become overwhelmed and replaced by standardized techniques that rely on proxy-variables.

More context-sensitive measures of quality and creativity of research in the social sciences and humanities globally is one element in the promotion of vital research sites on a global scale in the social sciences and humanities. One interesting observation may be that there now exist institutions that have an unparalleled productivity but that are premised on radically different assumptions than to management techniques. Institutes for advanced study is one type of such institution that is rapidly being diffused and copied and which is now being emulated on a scale unimaginable just one or two decades ago.

3.2 Scholarly trust and collaboration

Equally important is a readiness to conceptually outline a range of instruments that would allow for scholarly interactions every bit as intimate and filled with trust as those that have historically developed between Western Europe and North America. Of course, many of the great universities and research institutes in these parts of the world have long histories of such cooperation. Other institutes, including the leading institutes for advanced study, can point to impressive achievements in the more recent past. However, in no case should there be room for complacency; the future of a relatively peaceful and civilized world may to some considerable degree depend on the degree of openness with which such policies are now articulated.

3.3 First-rate research universities in global context

In a long-term perspective, it is possible to discern three major transformations of European universities in the course of the last two hundred years.^{viii} There is firstly the period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when through a period characterized by a deep crisis, manifesting itself in declining student populations but also in a questioning of the rationale of the university which was often perceived as an outdated institution, typical of a feudal society but not of societies as they emerged in the wake of the political and economic upheavals of the French and the Industrial revolutions. However out of this crisis there emerged the renaissance of the university, associated with the philosophically grounded reform efforts most closely associated with Wilhelm von Humboldt but also with a range of

other towering minds, but also associated with a range of efforts to strengthen states or rekindle a sense of nationhood.

Secondly, there is the period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which is characterized by the rise of the modern research-orientated university as an ideal that came to be embraced in most European countries, with Germany playing a lead role, as well as in countries and regions outside of Europe but bent on embarking on or involved in rapid processes of modernization. Thus some version of a research-orientated university started to become an institutional reality across the world from Berkley in the West to Tokyo in the East.

From an international perspective this is a highly uneven process characterized by complex forms of entanglement of national traditions, perceptions and misperceptions of the model, often the University of Berlin, which reformers tried to emulate, and the constraints of locally available resources. It is a crucial period not only of university reforms but also for the emergence and institutionalization of social science disciplines in university environments, again a process characterized by profound differences across countries and across different modes of studies of social conditions which gradually became academically and professionally entrenched social science disciplines.

Thirdly, there is the period in the decades after the Second World War, and in particular during the 1960s onwards, when the great transition from elite to mass higher education, to use Martin Trow's felicitous metaphor, occurs. This institutional shift entailed a dramatic change in the conditions and diffusion of the social sciences in a global perspective. This is the period when the social sciences became institutionalized across the entire range of such disciplines, when their size at least tripled or quadrupled both in terms of faculty, forms of professional organization, and in terms of student enrolment. This is also the period when new conceptions of the role of scientific knowledge in policy processes are being articulated. In general, this shift involves greatly increased expectations concerning the usefulness of knowledge in such processes as well as the creation of a variety of mechanisms to ensure that both the production and utilization becomes more closely tied to political and administrative processes.

These expectations often turned out to have been exaggerated and led to some reassessment and demands for a return to more basic and more unconstrained conditions for research also in the social and human sciences. However, for all practical purposes, the demands and expectations placed upon both universities as institutions and the social sciences and humanities have not subsided. Rather the terms of these demands have tended to become reformulated and consonant with the general tenor of what is sometimes labelled the audit society and with notions such as the new public management serving as guidelines for many administrative practices also in the field of science policy.

In parallel, the dramatic expansion of the higher education system as a whole, which took place in the 1960s in Europe and North America, was paralleled by a similarly large expansion in the 1990s. In the recent decade and a half, governance mechanism and administrative practices in European university systems have been transformed in a more thoroughly management orientation than was ever achieved during the first great transition to mass higher education in the 1960s.

It is to this background that any proposals concerning university-based social science and humanistic research must relate. It is obvious that this requires more profound and more imaginative reflection than ever before. Without securing research environments in many parts of the world on par with the best in leading North American universities, any declaration about overcoming knowledge divides on a global scale will sound hollow.

3.4 Early career developments

Needless to say, most of the support for universities will remain the prerogative and obligation of individual states. However there are now a number of initiatives in different regions of the world to complement national efforts with transnational ones. Even in relatively well-endowed countries such initiatives are needed. Two simple examples might illustrate these needs. Firstly, there is the field of the training of Ph.D. candidates. Secondly, there is the area of support and formation of the next generation

of leading scholars as they have received the doctorate and before scholars are awarded a professorial position. The example of the European University Institute provides a series of important lessons for the establishment of first-rate transnational Ph.D. programmes in Europe. One obvious measure to help promote diversity and competition would be to establish two or three new institutions of a similar kind as the EUI in other parts of Europe and involving stronger components of collaboration and enrolment from areas outside of the European Union.

A less resource demanding, and perhaps also less risky, approach would be to create a specific programme for transnational Ph.D. training to be hosted by consortia of European universities and research institutes in collaboration with analogous institutions in Russia, other NIS-countries or China, as well as other parts of the world. The experience of Max-Planck international research schools indicate that this is a viable, highly efficient as well as flexible model to promote first-rate research training in European environments.

The self-understanding of the academic profession as one that entails routine teaching of a canon (to allegedly ever less well prepared students) plus occasional research works that add marginally to established knowledge is still far too widespread in Eurasia. Change will come here only from future generations that need to be encouraged to innovate and the best and most daring of whom need to be brought into close contact with those teachers of the older generation who have demonstrated their capacity to innovate.

Graduate schools and settings for post-doctoral work need to be created or reformed to install such a spirit of permanent innovation against the far-too-common education towards conformity and programmed performance. Today, most European graduate schools emphasize punctual delivery of research work over quality and originality, even in the most promising institutions such as the European University Institute. In turn, the highly valuable European post-doctoral mobility programme, the Marie Curie awards, suffers from the lack of integration of the young researchers into innovative institutions and often turns into little more than a bridge over a career gap (as necessary and laudable as that may be) for Europe's most promising young scholars.

Despite such shortcomings, however, all these schemes have entailed significant support for exceptionally promising scholars at the stage beyond the doctorate and before the professoriate. Support at this level is absolutely crucial for the long-term vitality of research in the social and human sciences. Therefore it is highly welcome that the European Research Council has made an ambitious programme with so-called Starting Grants a keystone of its activities. In addition, all experience indicates that Institutes for Advanced Study constitute perhaps the single most efficient instrument for stimulating the most promising early career researchers and for helping them to formulate ambitious enough objectives for their research but also to become linked up at an early stage to networks of internationally leading scholars.

The fact that the United States created such institutes decades before similar developments took off in Europe is plausibly at least one of the reasons behind rapid American advances in the social, behavioural and human sciences in the decades after the Second World War and for the lead position that American scientists were long able to uphold in these fields. Today, the leading European institutes for advanced study are not inferior in terms of quality to the leading American ones. However, on the whole they are supported by considerably smaller and more precarious resources. Furthermore, virtually all their funding is of a national, if not of a regional or local, character. Thus one of the most cost-effective measures that could be undertaken on an international scale would be to constitute or to support existing high-quality institutes for advanced study. Even support just in the region of some one and a half percent of the total expenditures for R&D of the European Union would be sufficient to fund two European institutes for advanced study on the same scale as that of the famous Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton or alternatively some 15-20 institutes on the same scale as that of the presently foremost European institutes for advanced study.

3.4 Funding bodies and support schemes on a transnational level

Recent years have witnessed some conscious attempts at restructuring the research landscape, In the European context the most clearly visible one probably being the prospect of creating a European Research Area (ERA), but related ones are emerging in countries formerly belonging to the Soviet Union and in China. As attempts at resisting the mere withering away of old structures and at creating new ones, these policies are laudable. However, far too often these policies are an ill-fated combination of the old model of state-centred research developments with the novel emphasis on efficiency and short-term relevance that is particularly detrimental to research in the social and human sciences.

The research policy of the European Commission has long been guided by this particular combination, and given its increasing importance for research funding, it has probably had effects on research in the social and human sciences in Europe that can be analyzed with some concept of drift of epistemic criteria. However the creation of the European Research Council (ERC) indicates awareness of the problem and an effort to take countermeasures. Its creation can be seen both as an insight derived from the general considerations made above and as a further step of attempted restructuring after the shortcomings of the standard EU research policies became clear.

The task of the ERC is a formidable one, and not all of its aspects are easily spelt out. In the first instance, it provides the scholarly communities with a major *funding body of a new kind* that operates at arm's length from any state or government, thus reviving the most adequate feature of the old nation-state constellation, but does so on a regional basis. Overall, the establishment of the European Research Council (ERC) is a remarkable step towards the promotion of excellence in research also in the social and human sciences in Europe. Resources for this body should grow. National research councils should also be encouraged to start functioning in analogous ways by opening up to applicants on a European-wide and indeed global scale. The experiences of INTAS (the former European-NIS research agency and council for the countries of the former Soviet Union) demonstrate that such an initiative might easily be extended to areas beyond the members countries of the European Union not only in terms of the openness to applicants but, equally significantly, in terms of the direction and rules of the programmes itself, involving explicitly symmetric relations between the European Union and other major regions of the world.

If one agrees that excellence cannot be measured by some single 'best practice' set of criteria but depends on scholarly communities of interpretation, such communities will now have a larger size than in the old nation-state setting; the reference will be potentially to the global level, in institutional terms at least to the macro-regional level. Sheer size will make the task described before more difficult but also more necessary than in the old constellation. Regularly, one will relate to large numbers of researchers in a large number of universities and research institutions.

Even though it is doubtful whether the different regions of the world will have, or should aspire to create, a strongly stratified higher-education system such as the US, some need for merit-based stratification is evident at such a large scale. Short of a full institutional hierarchization of doubtful value and success, systematic but temporary merit-based differentiation could be the most useful tool.

At the institutional level, the temporary award of 'excellence' status, as currently practiced by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* and the *Wissenschaftsrat* in Germany, is a promising measure if practiced, which largely is the case, through peer communities of interpretation.

Analogously, private foundations should be similarly encouraged to move beyond national concerns and start funding more research initiatives and environments on a transnational scale. The Volkswagen Foundation programme on key themes in the cultural sciences provides an interesting example of support to the social and human sciences that encourage collaboration also with natural, medical and technological sciences in forms that are more sustained than that of projects and less formalized than that of establishing new institutes. Similar examples on a transnational scale would be a welcome contribution to the growth of first-rate research in the social and human sciences.

At the level of scholars and their careers, finally, the temporary (and possibly repeated) award of fellowships at select institutions such as the Institutes for Advanced Study is a means that is probably even more fruitful in terms of its flexibility.

3.5 Social science in the face of a global future

Global transformations are often depicted in sombre tones and involving severe threats. These threats are not a figment of the imagination. Humankind faces severe and real problems enough. These problems cannot possibly even be grasped, much less solved without the contributions of first-rate research efforts in the social sciences and humanities. These scholarly practices can only benefit from much closer global connections. This however will not be possible without transcending the pattern of “scholarly diplomacy” with its roots in the late nineteenth century, without realizing some of the new forms of collaboration suggested here.

Jointly the measures outlined above, or strategies along analogous lines, appear as necessary steps towards policies that would help overcome the knowledge divides of social science in a global context. They would be more sustained and long-term than presently dominant policies on a national level. Yet they would be more flexible and less constrained than most national schemes for support. At the very least they hold out the hope to yield a significant contribution to advance research excellence in the social sciences and humanities on a transnational scale.

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Footnotes

ⁱ The argument of this contribution draws on some of the conclusions of a project supported by FP 6 of the European Commission, on the social sciences and the humanities in Europe, Russia and other NIS-countries, and in China, "Global SSH", which I coordinated between 2006-2009. For an overview of the activities of the project please see Graham, <http://www.globalsocialscience.org>.

ⁱⁱ This section draws on several previous studies that I have conducted. For early periods see Anrason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock 2004; Arnason and Wittrock 2004; For the period of modern social science see for Wagner, Wittrock, and Whitley 1991; Rothblatt and Wittrock, 1993/2006; Wittrock and Wagner 1996; Heilbron, Wittrock, and Magnusson 1998/2001; Wittrock 2001; Wittrock 2008. Please also see Heilbron 1995 and Wagner 2001.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pollock (2006) is an authoritative recent analysis of these developments.

^{iv} For a modern classic anthology see Graham, Lepenies, and Weingart 1983.

^v Now almost classical contributions to this debate are Gibbons et al 1994, Nowotny, Scott, and Gibbons 2001. See also Weingart 1997. For an early analysis with diverging voices, see Gibbons and Wittrock 1985.

^{vi} Hägerstrand used this in a laudation for Walter Christaller on the "Vega day", April 24, 1967.

^{vii} One interesting example of this process is the so-called METRIS project (Monitoring European Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities) of the European Commission. Already during its first year it promised to be an effective tool in analysing and assessing important trends, strengths and weaknesses and needs at the level of research funding, research performance, and articulation of research communities in Europe. See *Emerging trends in socio-economic sciences and humanities in Europe: the METRIS report*, Brussels: European Commission, 2009.

^{viii} Please see Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993/2006; Wittrock 2008.