



The First World Social Science Forum Summary Report

1. Background

The International Social Science Council (ISSC) convened the first-ever World Social Science Forum (WSSF) in Bergen, Norway, from 10-12 May 2009.

In the context of the ISSC's Priority Actions for 2007-2010, which aim at

- demonstrating Social Science's global presence and authority, and
- engaging and advising international decision makers

the 2009 WSSF was envisaged as the first in a series of such ISSC-convened Fora, to occur at 3-4 year intervals, in parallel with an ISSC World Social Science Report series.

2. The theme and purpose of the 2009 WSSF

The adopted theme was ONE PLANET – WORLDS APART? (See Appendix) This theme sought to highlight current global reality: The peoples of the world are increasingly integrated into a global economy, yet in spite of all the unifying forces – technological, economic, political and cultural – the world is one of great divides. Identifying, describing and explaining the most salient current aspects of this reality was the first task of the WSSF.

However, the WSSF also had a second and parallel task: In order to address the state of the world it is also necessary to address the “state of the art”. To make social science relevant, pertinent and potent, social scientists have to scrutinize their own concepts about how society works, and engage in vigorous self-examination of how their approaches fare in order to define common tasks and set a shared agenda. The WSSF thus aimed to provide the occasion for this crucial self-critique.

This report provides an overview of the outcomes, structure and format of the 2009 WSSF, the overall programme principles and organisational guidelines used, the funding of the event, and the facilities and services offered.

3. WSSF Outcomes, in brief

The event demonstrated the capacity of the ISSC, as a global, membership-based association of social science organisations, to successfully convene leading social scientists from all around the world, and to provide a Forum for them to engage with one another and with senior representatives of the natural and human sciences, as well as with funders and policy and decision makers in the worldwide science community.

The Forum was covered extensively in the media (newspapers, Television, radio) at local, national, and international levels.

A survey of participants at this first WSSF suggests that the experience of the event was overwhelmingly positive. At the same time, numerous valuable suggestions for WSSF 2 have been received, both in terms

of focus and content, and for improving access, outreach, and event management. The WSSF series has become a “work in progress”.

As a measure of the success of the WSSF, the ISSC is already in receipt of several expressions of interest for the hosting of the envisaged 2012 WSSF. The ISSC Executive Committee will reflect formally on the 2009 WSSF event, and commence preparations for the second WSSF, at its forthcoming meeting in November 2009.

The Forum also provided key input for the World Social Science Report (due out early 2010), mobilizing eminent authors who would not otherwise have been available.

The intellectual product of the 2009 WSSF (audio recordings, abstracts, PPPs, as available) will appear on the ISSC website, once the editing process is complete.

4. Highlights of the 2009 WSSF, in brief:

- Some 800 participants took part, from some 80 different countries
- 5 Keynote/Plenary sessions and 38 Parallel Sessions featured over 200 speakers, respondents and moderators, including numerous leading scholars in their disciplines, and such eminent scholars as Nobel prizewinners Amartya Sen and Rajendra Pachauri.
- An opening ceremony hosted by the ISSC Executive featured numerous UNESCO and Norwegian dignitaries, with an opening keynote by ISSC’s president, Gudmund Hernes, while Helga Nowotny of the European Research Council spoke on “Out of Science? Out of Sync?” (Is the science we need – for rational policymaking – available and accessible?)
- Keynote and Plenary topics included “Challenges for the Social Sciences in the New Century” (Sen); “One Social Science - or Many?” (Jon Elster); “Towards Novel Assemblages of Territory, Authority and Rights” (Saskia Sassen); “Knowing Better – and Doing Worse? What Social Science can provide for Policymakers” (Peter Piot); Can Science Save Us? Challenges for Social Science from Climate Change (Pachauri and Roberta Balstad)
- Some 40 scholarships and support grants were awarded to promising and early career scholars, all of whom either presented their work on posters or via inclusion in parallel sessions
- The closing ceremony panel (Emir Sader - CLACSO, Michel Wieviorka - ISA, Berit Olsson – UNESCO HE Forum, Adam Habib – Univ. Johannesburg) reflected on the challenges identified during the WSSF proceedings, in a discussion of Social Science’s capacity to meet the current pressing demands that confront it.
- Side events included a meeting of the ISSC Executive Committee; an Editorial Board meeting of the World Social Science Report; the first meeting of the Scientific Committee of the new international programme on “Integrated Research on Disaster Risk” (IRDR), co-sponsored by the ISSC and the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the United Nations’ International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR); an international co-ordinating meeting of major funders of social science.

5. Theme, Structure, Funding, and Governance/Management of the WSSF

5.1. Thematic Focus and Programme Principles

The principles underlying the design of the 2009 WSSF programme were as follows:

- Topics should be interdisciplinary and give proof of how different fields can provide complementary insights;
- Some sessions should show how the social, behavioural and economic sciences are engaging with both the humanities and the natural sciences;

- The empirical orientation should be broadly comparative, aimed at using cross-national data, historical diversity and the impacts of institutional variation to gain insight;
- The Forum should demonstrate the relevance of social research for public policies and social interventions;
- The issues addressed should have a broad public interest across countries and cultures and should encompass major current issues such as development or climate change;
- The questions raised, approaches used and research presented should be scholarly, innovative and original, designed to re-examine established views by means of critical study and to contribute to generalizable knowledge;
- The Forum should aim to bring together prominent scholars and central actors from the global research community, but also strive to ensure participation from minorities, as well as countries with weaker research systems;
- The Forum should have an overall “Conference Theme”. For the 2009 WSSF the theme was “One Planet – Worlds Apart”;
- The Forum should link with the preparation of the ISSC’s first *World Social Science Report (WSSR)* so that contributions at the Forum can be modified for inclusion in the WSSR (anticipated publication date: early in 2010)

5.2. Attendance, Format, Content, and Organisational structure/process

Attendance

The 2009 WSSF attracted some 800 participants, of whom some 200 played a role as speakers, respondents or moderators.

Plenary and Parallel Sessions

Excluding side events, the Forum lasted two and a half days. For full details of the overall structure of the 2009 WSSF, and the topics and speakers for the 5 Plenary and 38 Parallel sessions see <http://www.rokkan.uib.no/wssf/files/schedule.pdf>

Plenary and parallel sessions comprised the core of the WSSF. For both types of sessions, sufficient time was made available for presentations and discussions. In the case of plenaries provision was made to allow at least 30-40 minutes for each keynote address, and for parallel sessions, at least 20-30 minutes per speaker.

In order to safeguard the highest quality of sessions, the speakers and discussants for all core sessions at the 2009 WSSF were pre-selected and invited by the Organising Committee (OC) and/or Session Organisers to participate. ISSC members and associates were invited to submit ideas for additional sessions, and many did so, ultimately swelling the number of plenary sessions to 5, and of parallel sessions to 38.

Special Sessions

The WSSF programme included a special session dedicated to the award of ISSC Prizes: the Stein Rokkan Prizes for Comparative Research, for the 2008 and 2009 years. Prize winners gave lectures of some 20-30 minutes, presenting the outstanding work which had won the award.

The 2008 prize was awarded to Prof. Cas Mudde (University of Antwerp, Belgium) for his book ‘Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe’. The 2009 prize was awarded to a group of collaborating authors: Robert E. Goodin (Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Australia), James Mahmud Rice (Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Australia), Antti Parpo (Somero Social and Health Services, Finland) and Lina Eriksson (Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Australia) for their book ‘Discretionary Time. A New Measure of Freedom’.

Poster Sessions

Poster sessions were used at the 2009 WSSF primarily to stimulate the participation of PhD students and early career scientists in the Forum. Some 55 posters were displayed in the foyers, with the authors at hand to engage with WSSF participants and respond to questions

Scholarships

The ISSC raised resources to make available a number of scholarships and subsidies that were used to support the participation of PhD students and early career scientists from developing countries in the WSSF. Candidates for scholarships were nominated by ISSC member associations, but applications submitted directly were also considered. Successful candidates were required to participate in the poster session.

Side Events

Side events included various meetings and workshops of ISSC member associations/organizations and other partners, including UNESCO. These were held in the margins of the Forum, just before and after the Forum. These events successfully “doubled up” on the WSSF’s utility to the scientific community, providing also an occasion to meet for additional groups of important social science stakeholders: decision makers, funders, etc.

Exhibitions

The WSSF provided a platform for publishers, professional bodies and others to disseminate social science publications and information sources. Exhibitors were not charged for exhibition facilities at the 2009 WSSF.

Venue

The renowned Grieghallen in Bergen was utilized as an appropriate “conference venue”, with adequate space to cater for plenary and most parallel sessions and side events, as well as all hospitality arrangements under one roof. This facilitated the ease/speed of getting from one session to the next and also facilitated more active networking amongst participants. All session/meeting rooms were equipped for power point presentations, while free WiFi services (including free internet access) and an equipped conference office were offered on site.

Recording

The WSSF 2009 sessions (with a few exceptions) were all recorded, and audio files will be made available on the ISSC website.

Language/Translations

The WSSF 2009 was conducted through the medium of English, as the available budget did not make it possible to offer any translation services. A small number of speakers did, however, request such services, and informal arrangements were made to cater for this.

Travel and Accommodation arrangements

The travel and accommodation costs of most speakers, discussants and session chairs involved in the 2009 WSSF were covered within the WSSF operational budget, as well as all scholarships expenses. Some ISSC member and partner organizations preferred to contribute “in kind” by directly financing certain speaker costs. A professional conference bureau was contracted to handle all practical arrangements, including reimbursement processes.

Information and Communications

A dedicated WSSF website, which was used also for the registration process, was set up. Reportage on, and products from the WSSF (audio files, PPPs, abstracts, etc) will be incorporated into the ISSC Website.

5.3. Funding

The 2009 WSSF operational budget amounted to some €1.1 million, managed centrally in Bergen, augmented by substantial “in kind” payments from ISSC members (who preferred to directly meet speaker costs for specific sessions). The main sources of income were as follows:

- Norwegian Government
- ISSC member and partner organisations
- Norwegian Research Council and other scientific organizations based in Norway
- University of Bergen
- Registration Fees

The full list of sponsors is as follows:

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)
City of Bergen
Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP)
Consejo Latino-Americano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO)
Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)
Earth System Science Partnership (ESSP)
Economic and Social Research Council, UK (ESRC)
Equality, Social Organization, Performance (ESOP)
European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST)
European Science Foundation (ESF)
Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC)
International Association of Universities (IAU)
International Council for Science (ICSU)
International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS)
National Research Foundation, South Africa (NRF)
National Science Foundation, USA (NSF)
NORFACE (New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Co-operation in Europe)
Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training
Norwegian Institute of Public health
Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration
Research Council of Norway
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
Sparebanken Vest
Statkraft
The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Germany (DFG)
The Freedom of Expression Foundation
The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO-COMEST; UNESCO-MOST)
University of Bergen, Norway
University of Maastricht, The Netherlands
University of Johannesburg, South Africa
World Health Organisation (WHO)

5.4. Governance and Management

The ISSC Executive Committee served as the overall Program Committee. A subgroup of the Executive Committee, consisting of Gudmund Hernes (president), Barbara Göbel, Katsuya Kodama, Alberto Martinelli, and Olive Shisana, were mandated to review the overall progress

After approval of the theme, principles, and structure by the ISSC Executive Committee and ISSC General Assembly, the EC – represented by its President Gudmund Hernes and Secretary-General Heide Hackmann – were ex officio members of the local organizing committee, which was in charge of defining and developing the substantive programme, (i.e. themes and speakers), and supervising the agency contracted to manage practicalities. The WSSF local organizing committee in Bergen were:

Professor Anne Lise Fimreite (Chair, University of Bergen/The Rokkan Centre)
Professor Stein Kuhnle, University of Bergen/Hertie School of Governance (Berlin)
Professor Tore Gronlie, University of Bergen
Professor Kjetil Bjorvatn, Norwegian School of Economics & Business Administration
Director Gunnar Sorbo, Christian Michelson Institute
Senior Researcher Kristin Hope, Rokkan Centre
Higher Executive Officer Hilde Kjerland, Rokkan Centre

The contracted conferencing agency in Bergen was Kongress & Kultur www.kongress.no

The increase in number of the Parallel sessions, particularly those sponsored directly by ISSC members, and the strong interest in Side Events, Scholarships and Exhibits, created a second body of content preparation/production and management. This was coordinated through the ISSC Secretariat in Paris, by the Secretary General and support staff, in liaison with the Bergen team.

Appendix

2009 World Social Science Forum Theme

ONE PLANET – WORLDS APART?

The peoples of the world are increasingly integrated into a global economy. National industries are interwoven in cross-national production networks, raw materials are drawn from all corners of the world, capital flows are crisscrossing state boundaries, communication connects the remotest parts of the earth and consumption in all countries is becoming more cosmopolitan by the day. New linking technologies such as satellites, the Internet and GPS gird the planet, and the content of new media has homogenizing impacts on world culture.

The peoples of the world are also connected by a growing number of institutions, public and private, ranging from the World Meteorological Organization to the African Union, from La Francophonie to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, from ASEAN to Mercosur, from Red Crescent to The International Social Science Council. At the individual level students abroad count millions and their number grows every year. Global travel has increased dramatically – in 2007 there were 900 million international tourist arrivals. And the peoples of the world are all becoming more interdependent by the spread and use of the same facilities, such as UTC, Windows or Google, and by sharing the same news. Science and research is one of the most fantastic things humans have learned to do together: ideas are developed and concepts exchanged across all borders: footnotes are globetrotters – as are viruses.

In spite of all the unifying forces – technological, economic, political and cultural – the world is one of great divides. Not just oceans and mountains separate peoples – there are enormous gulfs in wealth and health. The map of poverty depicts intractable geographical inequalities. Infant mortalities and life expectancies show great disparities, as does education.

THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF A SHRINKING WORLD

The planet is becoming more crowded – world population is projected to grow by 50 percent in the first 50 years of this century, and life expectancies are increasing.

The planet is becoming more intermingled – migration both between countries and continents is increasing. Many are dislodged by expanding trade, many seek opportunities by going abroad. Many are leaving home – internal mobility is also high: in twenty years more than two thirds of the world population will be living in cities. More communities are multiethnic.

The planet is becoming more polluted. Emissions of CO₂ and waste that harms air, soil and water are increasing. Climate change will affect everybody, but its impacts will vary greatly geographically and socially. Growth is outpacing the supply of resources; the world economy strains the limits of a finite earth, which sets the stage for more geopolitical competition.

The planet is becoming more unequal. Though millions have been lifted out of poverty, the spectre of hunger is again appearing – some states balance on the brink of catastrophe. The capacities of countries to cope with new threats from climate change or epidemics vary greatly. The risks for peoples and regimes are highly uneven.

The planet is becoming more juxtaposed – residues from many eras are simultaneously on the stage: tribal loyalties in modern states, ancient religions in secular societies, pre-scientific ideas in hightech cultures – burkas and blue jeans can be seen in the same streets. In modern societies different epochs are co-existing – but not without tensions and not always peacefully.

The planet is shrinking. A twelve-hour flight can take you from a city with the greatest opulence to a shantytown with the greatest destitution. Yet due to modern communication, even in the most abject quarters the poor can see what they do not have and hence sense more acutely their deprivation: What they see is what they cannot get.

Hence we are living in a dynamic world whose culture, economy and demography is changing by the day. But the world is not one world and responses to the forces at work are lagging. To cope is not just a question of understanding globalization but of appreciating foreign cultures, being sensitive to changing contexts and responsive to national systems.

SOCIAL SCIENCE: PROVIDING BLUEPRINTS FOR THE MODERN WORLD

While the technologies we use in our everyday lives are, to a large extent, the spin-offs of natural science, the arrangements within which national and global development has taken place have to a large extent been the spin-offs of ideas taken from the social sciences.

- The separation of powers or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 can trace its history to Enlightenment philosophers.
- After the Second World War the Bretton Woods agreements resulted in a foreign exchange rate system and global organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Their underpinning was economic theories about how to transcend the counterproductive beggar-thy-neighbour-policies of the inter-war years and how to promote full employment and economic growth by free trade.
- Great political experiments in the 20th century in all parts of the world were based on various versions of Marxist theory.
- UNESCO was built on a psychological model of human beings encapsulated in the very first sentence of the preamble to its constitution: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” If peace is to be secured, it cannot be based “exclusively on political and economic arrangements but must be founded on the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.”
- The welfare states constructed in the second half of the 20th century were predicated on theories about the political and social benefits of public economic arrangements.
- Development in the third world has been strongly influenced by theorists ranging from W. W.

Rostow to Gunnar Myrdal and André Gunder Frank, and by intellectual frameworks ranking from dependency theory to The Washington Consensus.

In short, social theories have had enormous impacts on the construction of the modern world – on how nations have been built, institutions cast, citizens empowered, alliances constructed, currencies based, trade organized, education provided and identities forged. Today social science research is widely used to provide decision support in all fields, from reducing poverty to enhancing education, from improving gender relations to fighting HIV/AIDS. The importance of social science has been heightened in proportion to the effects of human actions on global conditions – notably with respect to climate change. Social science contributes to the way decisions are framed and decision makers in all countries and in all areas apply social science more and more.

So more social science is done and more social science is used – yet social theories are sometimes incomplete, deficient or wrong. The great British economist John Maynard Keynes put it this way: "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist." Social change has, of course, also been strongly influenced by other notions than those of the social sciences – e.g. by popular beliefs, ideological doctrines, political myths – and common sense.

Taken together, all these strains of thought – some well taken, some badly misconceived – have resulted in vast changes that have not been intended and social consequences that have not been anticipated.

In this new century the world will confront and will have to cope with and manage multiple, simultaneous and intertwined crises, e.g. how to

- reduce the gap between rich and poor – and at the same time address climate change;
- promote economic growth – and at the same time bring about sustainable development;
- raise life expectancies – and at the same time manage growing populations;
- expand international exchange – and at the same time counter the threat of pandemics;
- promote universal values – and at the same time maintain cultural diversity;
- ensure secular concord – and at the same time respect the return of religion as a global force.

Nothing encapsulates the paradox of “one planet, worlds apart” more than the rituals of modern airport security, where every passenger is stripped of all paraphernalia, scanned and searched before allowed to pass into departure halls that more and more look alike – a symbol, indeed, of a world more integrated, yet more vulnerable and more insecure. The most pessimistic have written about the potential for a “clash of civilizations.” But everyone is aware that the blue planet is fragile, yet without quite knowing where all the risks are or how to tackle them.

CHALLENGES TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

To address these issues the social sciences have no magic formula and no quick fix. We know that there is a mismatch between, on the one hand, the geographical range of the impacts climate change, population dynamics and global trade, etc; and on the other hand, the reach of the institutions that try to cope with them. We know that we have to redesign economic policies and political arrangements – and change fixed mindsets as well.

The social sciences develop and test models and interpretations of individuals and society in order to explain how humans behave and change in interaction with each other and with the natural world. Social scientists devise models not just of society, but also for society – what can be done for better futures.

Yet in many ways the social sciences themselves are fragmented. Indeed, some argue that the disciplines are in disorder – that there is not one social science, but many. Rather than one paradigm, there are competing schools: If there is one planet with worlds apart, there is also the problem of the social sciences not being on the same map.

So, in order to address the state of the world it is also necessary to address the state of the art. In order to make social science relevant, pertinent and potent, social scientists have to scrutinize their own concepts about how society works, and engage in vigorous self-examination of how their approaches fare in order to define common tasks and set a shared agenda.

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