

Current Sociology

<http://csi.sagepub.com>

The Challenge of Doing Sociology in a Global World: The Case of Aotearoa/New Zealand

David C. Thorns

Current Sociology 2003; 51; 689

DOI: 10.1177/00113921030516009

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://csi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/51/6/689>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



International Sociological Association

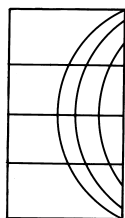
Additional services and information for *Current Sociology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://csi.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://csi.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>



David C. Thorns

The Challenge of Doing Sociology in a Global World: The Case of Aotearoa/New Zealand

Introduction

This article explores the global and local context in which practitioners are 'doing sociology' within Aotearoa/New Zealand, assesses the new structures that are emerging to enable/constrain our practice and explores the challenges these pose to sociology as both a discipline and as a set of research practices. This case study contributes towards an exploration of the question: why is doing sociology within a global world different? One response to this question would be that it is at the edges that the excitement and interest get created and challenges emerge to the established theories and paradigms. Globalization and its attendant processes have been the dominant frame through which change and transformations, in both the object of sociology and its research activities, have been viewed since the late 1980s. For some it has led to reduction in differences and variations across nations to give increased homogeneity. Globalization thus was seen as the triumph of modernity as it enabled greater rationalization and standardization of ideas and social and economic processes. However, for others it represents a series of transformations leading to increased diversity, fluidity and local difference thus privileging a more fine-grained and contextual form of analysis, leading us away from the grand narratives and structural explanations.

The economic debate around 'globalization' has been linked to the neoliberal project of increasing free trade and the opening of borders to greater competition to encourage efficiencies and thus greater opportunities for entrepreneurial activity and increase of wealth. For much of the 1990s the

Current Sociology, November 2003, Vol. 51(6): 689–708 SAGE Publications
(London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi) www.sagepublications.com
[0011–3921(200311)51:6:689–708;036279]

thrust of economic and research policy was towards a greater investment in knowledge creation that relied upon 'market-based knowledge' to shape decisions regarding funding and decision-making moving away from the direction of government. Such changes have led to a marginalization of sociology and other critical social sciences (social anthropology, gender studies, etc.). Knowledge under such conditions becomes a part of the 'global flow', a new commodity to be traded. This encourages a predominant interest in those aspects of knowledge which can deliver perceived, and actual, benefit in terms of GDP and are most easily turned into tradable commodities. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, a major 'Knowledge Wave' conference was held in 2001, that was strong on rhetoric about the necessity for a change in attitudes and patterns of investment to achieve the new growth economy drawing upon knowledge. One of the changes here was from a language of outputs to one of investment and outcomes, a broader vision but one in which sociology finds its place as a 'social science' or as 'social research practice' rather than as a separate and theoretically grounded discipline. In a world of evidence-based social/public policy development, sociologists increasingly become valued for their technical rather than their theoretical skills. They become constructed as service providers, training people in quantitative and qualitative methods for an expanding research job market. Funding also gets reworked to privilege end-user interests where the speeding up of processes and making them more acceptable so that they return profits and lead to greater economic growth take precedence. Private-public sector partnerships are sought to increase the overall level of research and development investment. Multidisciplinarity becomes the new 'goal' and linkages and collaborative 'teams', the key forms of delivery. In the private market we are constructed as 'market researchers' and utilized to 'change behaviour' to encourage positive responses.

Global World – What Difference Does it Make

In this section I want to explore the debates around what is globalization to provide a framework within which to examine the changes to sociological practices. Globalization has to be seen as a set of interrelated processes – economic, political, social and cultural (Urry, 2000). Discussion has often been oversimplified and seen in both the popular and more academic presses as predominantly a set of economically driven changes brought about by the development of new forms of information communication technologies, the increased speed of communication and the growth of virtual work and other activities, the free trade agenda and borderless worlds. However, the proliferation of debate and discussion has not necessarily led to greater clarity.

Scholte, for example, has recently observed that discussion of globalization is:

. . . conceptually inexact, empirically thin, historically and culturally illiterate, normatively shallow and politically naïve. (Scholte, 2000: 1)

A major debate is that of whether globalization is in fact anything new or whether at most it is simply the latest phase in a process of growing internationalization which has been going on for maybe 500 or more years. Wallerstein, for example, comments that:

Globalization is a misleading concept since what is described as globalization has been happening for 500 years. Rather what is new is that we are entering an 'age of transition'. (Wallerstein, 2000: 249)

Robertson and Khondker further point out that:

In spite of a number of attempts on the part of social scientists to conceptualize globalization in a careful analytical fashion, there is now so much loose and negative talk of 'globalization' that serious scholars of the compression of the world as a whole, in long historical perspective, face the increasingly difficult task of maintaining their intellectual seriousness in the face of slipshod and often heavily ideological employment of the word. (Robertson and Khondker, 1998: 26)

This critique reminds us forcibly of the need to see globalization within its historical context, the compression of the world and the reducing of time-space 'distantiation' that has occurred (Giddens, 1998). Each new invention to increase the speed of circulation brings with it the suggestion that social relations will be fundamentally changed due to the increased speed of travel and communications. The latest set of technological innovations has created a new era in global-based communication and the speed of reaction is now frighteningly fast. This was clearly shown by the collapse of the stock markets in the October 1987 crash, when computers triggered sales and the effects rapidly flowed around the world, quickly turning the downturn into a major collapse. The ideological overtones, within globalization, identify largely negative connotations about the obliteration of difference, about the homogenization of different aspects of life and the resulting loss of national identities, cultures and traditions (Ritzer, 1998). Many see this as an extension of 'colonialization and westernization', leading to the domination of non-western societies through a new form of imperialism (Jacobs, 1996).

For some, the idea of globalization is primarily ideological and not based on robust analysis and research evidence. For example, a recent analysis suggests that it is:

. . . primarily an ideological construction: a convenient myth which in part, helps justify and legitimates the neo-liberal global project, that is the creation of a global free market. (Held, 2000: 5)

Globalization is a multifaceted set of processes that embraces both arguments about economic change and where this originates, and the spread of ideas and practices about the nature and role of research knowledge. The latter discussion is in part associated with changing ideas of human capital and the relative value of individual and collective forms of activity and the role of knowledge and innovation. 'Knowledge/innovation and ideas are now seen as the dominant driver of economic wealth generation facilitated by advances in information communications technologies' (Castells, 1994; see also Hampden-Turner, 1998). New Zealand has embraced this view, with the Minister for Tertiary Education recently stating that 'it is quite clear that in an increasingly globalised world growth can best be fostered by the development of a knowledge economy' (Maharey, 2003). However, social research and policies appear to provide verbal support for this new form of economic growth rather than being central to its creation, as the minister went on to suggest that it was 'equally clear, we need social policies that supported the effort to achieve that goal'. Sociology as a discipline has been strongly shaped by such national and global debates and it is to how these have shaped social research and development over the past 20 years that we now turn.

Context for Sociology National vs Global Tensions

In Aotearoa/New Zealand the development of sociology has been largely shaped by its interconnection with 'public policy' debates as the system of tertiary education and research funding is dominated by state financing. The context for the teaching and research for sociologists within Aotearoa/New Zealand over the past 15–20 years has been shaped by the structural reforms undertaken by first Labour and then National governments over the 1980s and 1990s. What these attempted was a major change to the way that economic and social life was practised. The emphasis moved to greater individual responsibility and autonomy in decision-making where the market provided the information and signals to determine choice. The 'sovereign consumer' was at the centre of the economic logic that shaped the thinking and this suggested a need to move away from centrally determined decision-making. What this led to was a profound shift in the evaluation of what counted as knowledge and how education was conceived. Education was increasingly seen as training. This in turn linked to a particular view of human capital theory that argued individuals derived a direct economic benefit for their study and qualifications received; this opened the way to the charging of fees for tertiary education and the creation of greater competition between providers. Such changes then led to the rapid growth of private tertiary education providers seeking to fill niche markets. Increasing interinstitutional competition within a market-/consumer-driven education system leads to the

'bums on seats' approach and devalued and dumbed down the educational process. The rigour of disciplinary-focused courses and compulsory pathways becomes progressively changed to a greater emphasis upon choice and topicality (Dale and Robertson, 1997; George and Wilding, 2002).

Research also changed, with a shift to market analysis and intelligence, where market research and consumer surveys took on greater significance and the need to track changes in tastes and attitudes was more important than long-term social analysis. Market cycles for products tend to be short and often the desire for profit makes long-term considerations less important than short-term ones. The time that any company or enterprise wishes to stay in the market, local or global, and whether or not they have a long-term commitment to product development, thus is crucial to their interest in research and development. What occurred was a fundamental reshaping of the type of research knowledge that was considered to be valuable and in the expertise that was sought to provide this and the institutional structure for its delivery.

A key part of the new provider infrastructure for science and research activities was the Crown Research Institutes (CRIs). CRIs were created at the beginning of the 1990s, out of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, as part of the wider reforms put in place by the then Labour government with respect to government activity based around the funder-provider split. CRIs were companies created to engage in research as a business. What this did was to create competitive rather than collaborative pressures within and across the research community, that arguably have had negative impacts upon the quality and quantum of research. As Sen has recently observed:

... although there are clearly scientists who are thinly described businessmen, the general culture of science is one of sharing rather than buying and selling. (Sen, 2002: 51)

The new structure created thus challenges and changes the traditional culture of science – as one of sharing – and reconstructs it as one of competition in which research data are one aspect of commercial activity and provide opportunities for commercial advantage. In a major survey of scientists, increased competition within the new structures was one of the reasons given for the greater level of uncertainty with respect to job and career prospects for scientists, lower morale and increased turnover (Sommer and Sommer, 1997). The social sciences within these changes were in a relatively weak position as there was no dedicated CRI after the short-lived ISRD¹ failed in the early 1990s.

State social research capacity was reduced and where it was required it was obtained increasingly via consultants under short-term contract. The historical memory of state agencies was reduced as greater turnover occurred

with numerous restructurings (for example, the Department of Social Welfare was restructured seven times in eight years from 1986 to 1994; Pearman, 1994). The net result has been the loss of capacity and the absence of data and knowledge to assess policy options. Pool (1998), commenting on the 1980s and 1990s, notes that policy shifts during this time were not based upon systematic evidence and careful analysis but were driven by ideology, and a desire to change at all costs without first doing the assessment of the possible outcomes to ensure that they would improve the overall well-being of the population. By the end of the 1990s, there was thus a considerable reduction in social research capacity and a sociology enterprise suffering from declining levels of funding and much capacity absorbed by increasingly service-based teaching. The change of government in 1999 brought in a new wave of changes to both tertiary education and the place given to social research. The new government moved to emphasize the need for 'evidence-based' policy and acknowledged the lack of robust social information for policy-making arising out of the running down of the social research capacity over the previous decade. The solutions have included reforms to the tertiary sector, building capacity through greater interconnections between the research and policy-making communities and the growth of policy-related social research funding via the various investment instruments of government. All these changes increase the need for social research practitioners who have an appropriate range of technical skills. However, whether or not these will lead, as the Minister of Social Services and Employment in 2002 suggested, to 'a renaissance in the Social Sciences' is too early to tell. Further, it raised significant questions with respect to what that social science might in fact look like, which is what is examined in the next section of the article.

Pathways to Development: The Push to Policy Relevant Research and End-User Involvement

The 1990s saw a renewed emphasis in a number of countries upon 'policy relevant research'. This in turn encouraged a revival of interest in sociology along with other social sciences as providers of technical skills. Internationally debate can be seen in both an OECD project, currently examining the contribution of the social sciences to knowledge and decision-making, and in UNESCO's ongoing concerns with the research-policy linkage within its Management of Social Transformation (MOST) programme (Bedford, 2000). The OECD project draws attention to the way in which this interface leads to both the 'scientification of politics' and the 'politicisation of science' (OECD, 2000). The recognition of both the diversity of cultural heritage and the need to 'use our knowledge from all fields of science in a responsible manner to address human needs and aspirations without misusing this

knowledge' was a major challenge laid down to the research community in the final 'Declaration on Science and the Use of Scientific Knowledge' from the 1999 World Conference on Science (UNESCO, 1999). These moves towards a re-engagement of policy-makers with an evidence-based practice encourages governments to become more directive as to the issues, methods and content of the social science curriculum. It is both an opportunity and an area of possible danger for sociology as a discipline. The opportunity is to expand our research opportunities but it could be within a more heavily proscribed funding environment limiting innovation and privileging more applied research activity reflecting the interests of the government of the day.

In a more policy-driven approach to research knowledge a key question becomes who gets to decide what counts as evidence and knowledge and thus the appropriate range of research questions. Jessop (2002) in discussing recent theories of the state drew attention to the fact there is no such thing as an innocent research question. All our research arises out of particular theoretical and political agendas. This poses real problems for the nature of the relationship between social research and policy formation and has been the subject of ongoing debate. The question of how research and policy should interrelate is not a new problem but one that has been around in various guises from at least the Enlightenment. This initiated a view that the world was knowable through the scientific method of discovery. Through such knowledge it would then be possible to progress and create a better future. The idea of progress is thus deeply ingrained in our thinking.

The quest for knowledge, for the overall enhancement of the human condition, has been one of the driving forces for social research. The link, however, between research discoveries and public policy has been an area of controversy. There have been those who have argued for a strict separation of the researcher and the politician (Weber, 1948a, 1948b). The former were the generators of objective knowledge rigorously produced according to the highest standards of their science and this was then passed into the public realm to be debated and used by the 'professional politicians and policy makers'. A clear separation was advocated between the creation of scientific knowledge and its use. How a society determines this use, however, is not just about the quality of the knowledge, it also involves a host of political, social and ethical judgements about the nature of individual and collective well-being. The growth of early social science was strongly shaped by social reformers who were concerned not just to create knowledge about social conditions but also to use this actively to argue for change. The work of such people as Booth, Mayhew and Rowntree was focused upon identifying the relationship between poverty and a set of social conditions. This work demonstrated that poverty could not be a product of individual misfortune; rather it was a consequence of social conditions and as such required intervention by government to produce a durable solution. The early social

statistics movement was strongly committed to the belief that facts when discovered and clearly and unambiguously laid out before the nation's legislators would lead to appropriate practical action (Thorns and Sedgwick, 1997; Abrams, 1968).

At the 1998 World Congress of Sociology, a session was organized by UNESCO's Social Science Division looking at the research-policy interface. The presentations drew attention to such issues as how questions were formulated, the robustness of the methods and the need for dialogue between researchers and policy-makers. A group of urban planners from Toronto then presented a paper that described a carefully constructed piece of research that appeared to meet the criteria articulated. The results of the project though were disregarded due to political changes in the state and city government as a consequence of the electoral process. The example draws attention to the political nature of the research-policy interface.

From Knowledge Base to the Knowledge Wave

The debate within Aotearoa/New Zealand about the social research agenda for the past five years has continued a discussion which stretches back to at least the 1930s and involves various attempts to establish an appropriate institutional structure for the funding and shaping of social science and numerous reviews that seek to identify our deficiencies (Appendix 1). Since the early 1970s, social sciences have been somewhat endlessly reviewed and many suggestions for change have been advanced. We have had a chronic deficiency in research funding and capacity building. The Social Science Research Fund has come and gone as has also a Social Science CRI. Our relatively meagre funding, relative to both other countries and other areas of scientific research, has been acknowledged, and our relative marginality within the science envelope has been argued by many of our colleagues – but little has really changed. This article now looks at the last five years and then turns to the questions of why there is this lack of change.

During the late 1990s, the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology (MoRST) undertook a Foresight exercise to map out the directions for science over the next decades. This involved a process of stakeholder groups and submissions from a range of 'end-users' and research providers and communities (Buwalda, 1998). The result was a strategy document, *Blueprint for Change* (MoRST, 1999), and a new structure of investment for the public good science fund, administered by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST). The investment by FRST was to be guided by the government's higher-level goals and organized around a series of Strategic Portfolios. These were then developed in consultations with end-users and eventually a range of portfolios was produced (see Appendix 2). Subsequently, existing research projects funded by the foundation were initially 'progressed' into the new Strategic Portfolio Outline (SPO) framework.

Since this exercise the Foundation has moved to review and reinvest through a strategy which has included tenders, negotiations and calls for applications. In the new investment framework much greater attention is given to the 'needs' of the end-users and the outcomes for the research such that before the research is begun applicants are required to indicate the ways in which the research will add value to the various end-users seen to be relevant within a particular SPO.

Sociology has struggled somewhat in this process due to the disparate nature of end-user communities and the absence of end-users other than government. If government, in its various guises, as it increasingly appears, is the major end-user, this provides a growing capacity for government to steer more firmly research and development within the social area. This in turn leads to sociologists who seek funding becoming more 'applied' in their work and also potentially valued for their technical rather than their theoretical skills.

In January 2001, the Royal Society of New Zealand published a manifesto for Science, Technology and Innovation. This argued for more research and investment to increase our level of innovation and create the 'knowledge economy/society'. Our level of investment in R&D had, they showed, fallen behind that of other OECD countries as we invested about 50 percent of Australia's investment and 30 percent of the US's in terms of dollars per head of the population. Further, we invested most heavily in environmental, resources, agriculture, forestry and fishing R&D continuing a focus upon commodity production within our economy. Investment in industrial and social R&D has been, by contrast, at a relatively low level. The manifesto argued for greater attention to industrial and more 'evidence'-based social research for policy.

The government investment in innovation is shown in Table 1. The table, taken from the 2001 manifesto, shows the weight in the investment given to each of the 'high-level goals' of economic innovation, capacity building – a strong emphasis here upon human capital – and social, health and environmental goals. However, questions could be raised regarding whether social research is seen as having a central place in this framework for long-term development. The legacy here of the 1990s reforms and the creation of the CRIs within a competitive model can be seen. This model led to interinstitutional competition for research dollars between CRIs, universities and private providers. Some CRIs have become successful companies but has this been at the expense of their portfolio of research activity? Has the need for commercialization been beneficial or has it limited the attention to basic research in favour of more applied and end-user driven agendas?

The table shows that not all investment goes into applied research. The two areas outside this are the investment via vote education and the Marsden Fund. Social science within the Marsden Fund receives somewhere in the

Table 1 Government Research, Science and Technology Goals and Investments (2001)

<i>Place on the spectrum</i>	<i>Economic goals</i>	<i>Capacity building</i>	<i>Social, health, environmental, govt depts' research</i>	<i>Gaps/opportunities</i>
Near to application	Trade New Zealand	Enterprise scholarships – eventual	Research in government departments –	Encourage foreign direct investment
↓	Industry New Zealand	NZ\$20 m	NZ\$95 m	Tax incentives
↓	BizInfo, etc.	Maori scholarships – NZ\$0.4 m	HRC – health research – NZ\$48 m	Help SMEs
↓	Venture capital	Postdoctoral fellowships – NZ\$5 m	FRST social (NZ\$4.3 m), Maori (NZ\$2.7 m), health (NZ\$1 m), environmental (NZ\$84 m) research	IP use and protection
↓	Seed capital			Public/private partnerships
↓	Incubators			Target value-added research
	Grants for private sector R&D NZ\$12 m	Doctoral scholarships – eventual NZ\$10 m		Long-term policy commitment
Underpinning	Technology New Zealand NZ\$25 m	NERF – NZ\$51 m		Specialize in tertiary sector research
	Research for industry NZ\$170 m	Science and Innovation Advisory Council		Review EFTS, loans and equipment funding
	NERF – NZ\$ 51 m			Conserve human capital
	EFTS-funded research in universities – NZ\$144 m			Rationalize teaching
	Public-good oriented non-specific output funding (NSOF) – NZ\$27 m			Develop New Zealand's capacity to absorb overseas research
	Marsden Fund – NZ\$26 m			

EFTS: Equivalent full-time students.

IP: Intellectual property.

SMEs: Small and medium-sized enterprises.

HRC: Health Research Council

order of NZ\$700,000–800,000 per year equating to about seven or eight projects of which maybe one would be drawing upon the discipline of sociology. Thus the research underpinnings of our discipline come mostly from the vote education funding. This is 'undirected' research and relates to the contractual time that staff working in the universities are expected to devote to research. However, in the tertiary reforms currently in progress within Aotearoa/New Zealand the new Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) will initiate a separation of teaching and research funding as part of the government's reforms of higher education. Research funding to universities will be based on a new formula relating to a performance-based assessment process. In addition, the government under the new legislation has given itself greater powers to 'steer' the system and make it more responsive to national needs and government goals. The fate of sociology or indeed any critical social science or humanity under this proposed regime becomes a concern. The restructuring of the wider public good research funding environment encourages a belief that the overall aim is increasingly to create a tertiary and research system more shaped by current government priorities and less by the needs of disciplines to create a vibrant set of critiques and underpinning theoretical informed research activities.

Table 2 shows the levels of social science investments as at 2001. One of the implications of the new investment structure is that funding specifically 'social research' has been reduced with the move to include 'social science' components in the other SPO areas. However, one of the problems here has been the way that the established research entities within these other SPOs, largely the CRIs, have chosen to 'expand' their operations to cover some social science, rather than create partnerships with social scientists that lead to the reframing of the research agendas being pursued. This rather than enhancing social science within the SPO framework works to marginalize activity and often leads to social scientists being constructed as 'market researchers' to deal with the application of the results of science and enable the acceptance of change.

Further insight into the thinking of policy-makers and government about social research can be seen through the work and ultimately the fate of OWGASS (Officials' Working Group on Applied Social Science), an interdepartmental working group arising from the Hawke Report of 1995, on social research within government. The purpose was to develop a new strategy for the development of government social research for policy development. A set of position papers was commissioned from the Royal Society and two were completed. The first set out a research agenda for family research and the second one for ageing. This process then ended somewhere in the year 2000 and yet another round of consultation and working parties took place in 2001.

In 2001, the government initiated a report into aspects of social research

Table 2 Social Science Investments

<i>Source</i>	<i>Distinctive characteristics</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Scale</i>
Society and culture research funded by the Foundation in 1999/2000	Strategic research	NZ\$11.69 m (NZ\$3.8 m of this investment was mapped to the new social research output class) NZ\$2.19 m	4% of the PGSF in 1999/2000 went to society and culture research
Social science research funded by the Marsden Fund in 1999/2000	Focus on basic research of international excellence	Approx. NZ\$4 m	9.5% of the Marsden Fund in 1999/2000 went to social science
Social science research funded by the Health Research Council	Linked to significant health issues		Approx. 50% of the HRC's public health research investment is linked to social science research
Social science research funded by departments	Driven by policy problems	Approx. NZ\$20 m performed by government departments – Treasury, Statistics Aotearoa/ New Zealand and the Ministries of Social Policy, Education and Health all contribute to social research	It has been estimated that the government only performs a third of the research that it funds in total (NZ\$60 m funded from MoRST's statistics 1997/98)
Society and culture research performed by universities ^a	Strongly driven by the interests of individual researchers and the chances of being published in a peer-reviewed publication.	NZ\$112.5 m ^b	27.9% of all research universities reported undertaking in 1997/98 went to society and culture.

^a As reported in MoRST's Research and Development Statistics 1997/8.

^b The reference group contends that little of the EFTS-based 'society and culture' output within the tertiary sector (NZ\$112.5 m) is targeted, transparent or relevant to improving the knowledge base for social policy. We await the latest R&D statistics to update the figures for social science investments, as we have concerns as to the veracity of these figures, particularly those linked to EFTS. However, getting firm data is partly a function of the independence of university providers, the difficulty in getting any strong statistics derived from EFTS funding streams, and the nature of research carried out to inform teaching and learning.

PGSF: Public Good Science Fund.

capacity. MoRST undertook this review through the first half of 2001 with an interim report being published in July – ‘Connection, Resources and Capacities’ (MoRST, 2001). The report is concerned with the question of how well the strategic knowledge needs for policy research are met and how such capabilities and capacities that exist can be improved. The report has been fed into the new work programme of the recently established Ministry of Social Development and has led to the establishment of the Improving the Knowledge Base for Social Policy project (IKB) and a new interdepartmental group, SPEAR (Social Policy, Evaluation and Research). A decision to hold a major Social, Policy and Evaluation Conference in alternate years beginning in 2002 was also taken as a result of the report to promote better linkages between researchers, policy-makers and community groups.² However, the 2002 budget allocations for research investment have not increased the amount available for social investment via the major public good investment agent FRST, although some increase has been included in the 2003 (May) budget.

The final element added to the funding and research mix in 2001/2 was the establishment of five Centres of Research Excellence (CORES) as multi-disciplinary, multi institutional research centres.³ The creation of such centres is part of the larger reshaping of the tertiary sector around research and teaching as increasingly separate activities and a desire to concentrate resources rather than spreading them across all tertiary institutions. The implication of this could be that some disciplines and some institutions assume a greater teaching role and that advanced teaching and research become increasingly concentrated in COREs within a smaller number of institutions. The move along such a path would take development away from disciplinary-based activity and towards topic- or theme-based entities drawing on a range of disciplines and research.

New Structure and New Institutional Arrangements: Chaos or Complexity?

A new structure of both postgraduate education and research funding is at present being created with new institutional structures suggested to provide ways of achieving better returns on government investment. One of the continuities in the story is the constantly changing arrangements and the non-changing amount of investment. The moving of money between programmes and funding agencies without increasing the total amount available will not solve the problem of underinvestment and limited attention to capacity building.

Further, the way that the boundaries are being constructed around the various vehicles for the delivery of funding provides a clue to the relative power of the key players within the research and technology system. As social research is closely tied to government, the interface between academic

researchers, policy-makers and researchers within government has been a significant area of controversy. A degree of distrust has in the past been exhibited between policy- and academic-based researchers. There has been some unwillingness to see the significance of changing the institutional arrangement for the determination of topics and funding as crucial to improving the current situation. If the solution to the present inadequacies is to encourage departments to 'investigate innovative and creative ways to address issues' there is also a need to be able to identify why this has not previously taken place. Some of this arises because we do not have the necessary institutional structures to encourage this form of more creative or innovative activity (O'Brien et al., 2002).

Challenges to Our Disciplinary Base

This article has traced the recent changes to the funding regimes of research and teaching within which sociologists within Aotearoa/New Zealand currently work. These are the parameters, shaping our development and posing challenges for how we might determine our future. They are not unique to Aotearoa/New Zealand – many are part of a global agenda which privileges some forms of knowledge and research over others and that sees merit in a move towards closer linkages between research and policy-making driven more by evidence. However, as the history of sociology shows, these debates are not new and have been present since the inception of our discipline, as we have mostly been linked to the state for funding, particularly in those countries which lack private philanthropic trusts, and as such open to the pushes and pulls of the political agenda. At present we are seen somewhat more positively than in much of the 1980s and 1990s but as part of this rehabilitation we are being challenged to become more policy relevant, technically sophisticated and multidisciplinary in our practices. In part this is seen as necessary for the wider engagement with a more complex and multi-ethnic world in which the faith in forms of science based on 'objective truth claims' has weakened.

The rise of the multi-trans-post-interdisciplinary debate raises the question of whether our disciplinary boundaries are silos or opportunities. Have we become guardians of these boundaries for sound reasons or as reactions to the threats of funding cuts and declining numbers and employment security, given most Aotearoa/New Zealand universities over the past few years have been involved in redundancy and repositioning exercises? On a more positive note, knowledge gaps have opened up and spaces have been created across and between existing disciplines challenging us to find ways of both teaching and researching that stretch our boundaries. Increasingly, as noted, the funding environment is challenging us to move beyond the boundaries of our discipline. The range of problems that are now central to the research agenda – such as the genetic engineering debate, sustainable

development, biosphere reserves, climate change, global terrorism, information communications technology, poverty eradication and globalization in all its guises – are not ones that are the property of any one discipline.

What does this mean for degree structures and departmental frameworks and for national and international sociology associations, including the International Sociological Association, and how well positioned are they to cope with the emerging environment? The retention of undergraduate degrees in disciplines is important to allow the development of some roots for the next generation of students. They need to have a sense of the history of the discipline of sociology and its key ideas and ways of exploring the world. Here we are faced with challenges to the shape of the curriculum that is taught – should it be shaped by choice or are there still a set of key theories, concepts, areas of scholarship that the student of sociology needs to acquire or are we going to move into the model of seeing us as technical experts providing students with a set of skills that are marketable?

At the graduate level, increasingly the future is likely to be one of greater multi-/transdisciplinary activity in both teaching and research and there will be a need to fashion more programmes that provide pathways that assist students in broadening their analytical and research skills. Here the development of research programmes and the incorporation of graduate students more actively into those programmes is crucial. For this secure funding is needed and here is our dilemma – to do this in the current climate will push us in the direction of becoming a more applied discipline and endanger our critical and theoretical capacities. How we resolve these dilemmas will contribute to the shaping of the future path of sociology within the 21st century.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the edges are a good place to view the global–local interconnections. In this case the edge has been Aotearoa/New Zealand and the experience of tertiary and research reform over the past 20 years and its impacts upon the development of sociology. From the mid-1980s to the 1990s, neoliberal reforms to both the tertiary sector and research environment resulted in extensive change to how both were done. The increased competitiveness and the creation of a less integrated system resulted in a shift to a more commercialized model of research funding, driven much more strongly by end-user interests and a more consumer-centred tertiary education system. Social sciences in general and sociology in particular, under these conditions, became marginalized and reconstructed as market or consumer research and as providers of service teaching rather than being valued for their discipline's contribution. For many sociologists, this was a time for retreat from public engagement. In 1999, with the return of a

centre-left government, the social sciences became more central to government. Sociology in this new context has been encouraged to restructure itself around technical – largely quantitative – competencies and policy-related research to provide an evidence base for government social policies. These moves have created more space for sociology but have required the discipline to embrace a more multidisciplinary framework and focus upon technical skills at the expense of its theoretical and critical roots. It has also reinforced, in the absence of private philanthropic trusts, the discipline's dependence on government funding, and thus the ability of governments to steer the research agenda. The challenge for the discipline in this new environment is to maintain its theoretical content while contributing constructively to multidisciplinary development and policy debates and refusing to accept a marginal or add-on role in research development. In doing so we will need to challenge the present political rhetoric about the use of evidence in policy-making and in the limited vision allowed for sociology within the knowledge economy/society being advanced. National sociologies, aware of global processes but also sensitive to the way that these are mediated through local practices and structures, are still an essential part of the overall discipline and its future development.

Appendix 1: Key Documents/Inquiries and Working Groups 1995–2002

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1995 | Hawke Report: <i>Drawing on the Evidence</i> |
| 1997 | <i>New Zealand Knowledge Base; Social Sciences</i> |
| 1998/9 | Foresight |
| 1999 | <i>Blueprint for Change</i> |
| 1999 | Royal Society Foresight Submission Social Sciences |
| 1999–2000 | Royal Society Conferences on Leadership, Human Capital, Management |
| 2001 | Manifesto for Science, Technology and Change, Royal Society of New Zealand |
| 1998/9 | OWGASS (Officials' Working Group on Applied Social Science) |
| 2001 | 'Transforming New Zealand: Backing our Innovators to Get the Most From Research, Science and Technology'; MoRST, 2001. Sets out the new 'investment strategy'. |
| 2001 | (Ministry of Research, Science and Technology (MoRST). <i>Connections, Resources and Capacities</i> , report of the reference group improving the knowledge base for social policy |
| 2001–2 | 'Improving the Knowledge Base for Social Policy' (IKB project), Ministry of Social Development |

Appendix 2: *Blueprint for Change* (1999: 11)

FRST was subsequently restructured around four higher level goals:

Innovation

Accelerate knowledge creation and development of human capital, social capital, learning systems and networks in order to enhance New Zealand's capacity to innovate.

Economic

Increase the contribution knowledge makes to the creation of value of new and improved products, processes, systems and services in order to enhance competitiveness of New Zealand enterprises.

Environmental

Increase knowledge of the environment and of the biological, physical, social, economic and cultural factors that affect it in order to establish and maintain a healthy environment that sustains nature and people.

Social

Increase knowledge of the social, biological, environmental, cultural, economic and physical determinants of well-being in order to build a society in which all New Zealanders enjoy health and independence and have a sense of belonging, identity and partnership.

Target Outcomes

- Wealth from new knowledge-based enterprises;
- Innovative manufacturing and service enterprises;
- Sustainable use of natural resources;
- Wealth-creating food and fibre industries;
- Future-focused global intelligence;
- Infrastructure for a knowledge society;
- People with knowledge, skills and ideas;
- Strong families and communities;
- Maori development;
- Vibrant culture and identity;
- Health for all;
- People living in safe and healthy environments;
- Healthy, diverse and resilient ecosystems;
- New Zealand in the global biophysical environment.

Strategic Portfolios

(developed by Foundation for Research Science and Technology)

These are in five groups:

1. Innovation-Based Enterprise Group;
2. Infrastructure and Resource Group;
3. Maori Development;
4. Social and Economic and Public Life;
5. Environment and Bio-Diversity.

Within these SPOs there are 'portfolios' and by 2002 these numbered 71.

Notes

An earlier version of this article was presented at the World Congress of Sociology, Brisbane 2002 at a session 'Off the Edge' focusing on the challenges to 'national sociologies'.

- 1 The Institute for Social Research and Development – formed largely from the social scientists within the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. It struggled due to small size and insufficient capital to compete in the new funding environment of the 1990s and by 1995 after only four years was closed.
- 2 The conference was originally scheduled for April 2002 but was postponed at the last minute to April 2003 on the grounds that April 2002 was too close to the general election in July. This does indicate the close interconnection between social policy, evaluation and research and national politics.
- 3 In April 2003 the government announced funding to create a CORE in the social sciences – to link leading researchers in the tertiary sector to build critical mass in priority areas in the social sciences aligned with the government's goals. The creation of this entity will be subject to a tender process through the new Tertiary Education Commission.

References

- ABRAMS, P. (1968) *The Origins of British Sociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- BEDFORD, R. D. (2000) 'A Robust Research/Policy Interface: International Migration and Social Transformation in the Asia-Pacific Region', paper presented at the OECD Workshop on 'The Contribution of the Social Sciences to Knowledge and Decision Making', College of Europe, Bruges.
- BUWALDA, J. (1998) 'Priorities and Leadership – A Government View', in *Proceedings of a Conference Sponsored by the Academy Council of the Royal Society*, Miscellaneous Series 54, pp. 10–15. Wellington: Royal Society.

- CASTELLS, M. (1994) 'Technopoles: Mines and Foundries of the Informational Economy', in M. Castells and P. Hall (eds) *Technopoles of the World*, pp. 1–11. London: Routledge.
- DALE, R. and ROBERTSON, S. (1997) '“Resiting” the Nation, “Reshaping” the State: Globalisation Effects on Educational Policy in New Zealand', in M. Olssen and K. Morris Matthews (eds) *Education Policy in New Zealand: The 1990s and Beyond*, pp. 209–27. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- GEORGE, V. and WILDING, P. (2002) *Globalization and Human Welfare*. London: Palgrave.
- GIDDENS, A. (1998) *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- HAMPDEN-TURNER, L. (1998) *The Intelligent Economy: Culture, Value and Competitiveness*. Edinburgh: Scottish Council Foundation.
- HAWKE, G. (1995) *Drawing on the Evidence: Social Science Research and Government Policy*. Wellington: Ministry of Research, Science and Technology.
- HELD, D. (2000) *A Globalizing World? Culture, Economics and Politics*. London: Routledge.
- JACOBS, J. (1996) *The Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*. London: Routledge.
- JESSOP, R.D. (2002) 'Recent Theories of the State', seminar presented to the Department of History, University of Canterbury, September.
- MAHAREY, S. (2003) 'Connecting Policy, Research and Practice', Minister of Social Services and Employment, Associate Minister of Education (Tertiary Education), Speech to the Social Policy and Evaluation Conference, April, Wellington.
- MORST (MINISTRY OF RESEARCH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY) (1999) *Blueprint for Change*. Wellington: MoRST.
- MORST (MINISTRY OF RESEARCH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY) (2001) *Connections, Resources and Capacities*, interim report. Wellington: MoRST.
- O'BRIEN, L., OPIE, B. and WALLACE, D. (2002) *Knowledge, Innovation and Creativity: Designing a Knowledge Society for a Small Country*. Wellington: MoRST.
- OECD (2000) *Social Sciences for Knowledge and Decision Making: Proceedings of a Workshop on the Social Sciences*. Paris: OECD.
- PEARMAN, G. (1994) 'The Pursuit Of Organizational Legitimacy: Organising Social Work Services in the Department of Social Welfare 1984–94', MA, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.
- POOL, I. (1998) 'Social Sciences and an Evidence-Based Policy', in *Proceedings of a Conference sponsored by the Academy Council of the Royal Society*, Miscellaneous Series 54, pp. 62–73. Wellington: Royal Society.
- RITZER, G. (1988) *The McDonaldization Thesis: Explorations and Extensions*. London: Sage.
- ROBERTSON, R. and KHONDKER, H. H. (1998) 'Discourses of Globalization', *International Sociology* 13: 25–40.
- ROYAL SOCIETY OF AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND (1999) *Social Sciences Submission to Foresight*, October.
- SCHOLTE, J. A. (2000) *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. London: Macmillan Press.

- SEN, A. (2002) 'The Science of Give and Take', *New Scientist* April: 51–2.
- SOMMER, J. and SOMMER, D. J. (1997) *Profiles: A Survey of New Zealand Scientists and Technologists*, Royal Society of New Zealand Miscellaneous Series 43. Wellington: Royal Society.
- THORNS, D. C. and SEDGWICK, C. (1997) *Understanding Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- UNESCO (1999) 'Science Agenda – Framework for Action', text adopted by the World Conference on Science, July 1999; at: www.unesco.org/science/wcs/eng/framework.htm
- URRY, J. (2000) *Sociology Beyond Societies*. London: Routledge.
- WALLERSTEIN, I. M. (2000) 'Globalization or the Age of Transition? A Long-Term View of the Trajectory of the World System', *International Sociology* 15: 249–65.
- WEBER, M. (1948a) 'Politics as a Vocation', in H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, pp. 77–128. London: Routledge.
- WEBER, M. (1948b) 'Science as a Vocation', in H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, pp. 129–56. London: Routledge.