



# Social Research and Social Practice in Post-positivist Society

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Scientific methods are not tool kits that researchers can select to suit their tastes and preferences to compete with other techniques contending to reach the truth. Research instruments in sociology are no more than in other sciences independent of concepts and problematics from which they emerge, and they in turn structure the kinds of questions and theoretical concepts that they can be used to deal with. Instead of a choice of methods it is more appropriate to talk about 'styles of reasoning', like Ian Hacking, who has argued that although the social world is constructed differently by different styles of reasoning, this is not to say that the constructions are arbitrary (1990: 6). It simply means that, for example, an explanation/prediction formulated in probabilistic quantitative terms already implies a great deal about the world in its concepts which, in turn, are integrated with a statistical methodology. The same reality represented in another vocabulary and through a biographical or ethnographic methodology would look different but no less true.

How should we classify such styles of reasoning in sociology, and how could we explain or understand the reasons for such differences? In this article I argue that a major change in sociological styles of reasoning took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s both in the way sociology began to conceptualise the social world and in the way sociological research was related to social practices or policy-making. One apparent indication of the new style of reasoning was the boost in qualitative research and the accompanying 'cultural' or 'linguistic' turn in sociology (see Chapter 1). These changes reflect the role that social sciences first had in the three post-war decades and then lost when the welfare state construction period had attained maturity.

## **REPRESENTATIONAL, EPISTEMIC AND POSITIONAL DIMENSIONS OF KNOWLEDGE**

Sociological studies tell about social reality in three different ways. First, they report

knowledge about social realities. This knowledge depends on their conceptual framework and on their instruments of observation such as ethnography, media analysis or the survey technology, but within the constraints of the concepts and instruments, knowledge it is. This is the *representational dimension* of knowledge. For example, a study on the relationship between social capital and social exclusion might be made with statistical methods, which require that the abstract categories 'social capital' and 'social exclusion' are operationalised as measurable indicators that describe individuals or collectivities. Most likely, a fair amount of drug users would be found among the most excluded. Another study might compare Western countries and come to the conclusion that most of them apply strict prohibitions on a selection of pharmaceuticals – not all, like alcohol, but many such as opiates, cocaine, amphetamine or MDMA ('ecstasy'). Possession, distribution, production and import of the prohibited drugs are legal offences with penal consequences. The role of the criminal justice system as the interface between the state and the drug user in many ways operates as a mechanism of exclusion. The term 'prohibition' is also an abstract category and describes at least part of the same reality as the quantitative study, but from a completely different angle. Finally, a third study, made with ethnographic methods, could analyse the social relationships in the different types of public social and health services offered to illicit drug users, and find that at the low-threshold needle exchange clinic the (often voluntary) social workers are allies of their clients, trying to help them to get medication and other help, whereas the workers at the substitution treatment clinic require a great deal of 'motivation' and effort from their clients, often with the consequence that they are felt to be part of the penalising control system rather than a help. Again, we are observing mechanisms of exclusion, including social capital and the lack of it, but from a completely different angle than the other two studies. All of them report facts that

represent the same reality, but within very different styles of reasoning and methods.

Secondly, the style of reasoning itself tells us about society. The three studies of social exclusion, with their different methods and concepts, involve very different problematics although their subject matter is at least partly the same. The first probably would be built on communitarian hypotheses on how social relationships support people in their self-control, autonomy and integration into educational and work life. The second would raise different kinds of questions concerning the authority of the state, the basis of selecting some pharmaceuticals as legal and others as illegal, and the intended and unintended consequences of prevention efforts. The third would pay attention to the fact that social capital may be of very different kinds, and that it is not entirely an independent variable in the processes of social exclusion but depends, instead, on power relationships in society. All three studies involve moral investments in the way they categorise their observations, they represent not only the reality as facts but also wider frameworks in which they see society, the state, the individual and the interface between citizens and the public powers. In other words, they are motivated by different interests of knowledge.

The interests of knowledge which define the needs and dispositions to explain and understand what happens in society determine the types of questions that can be asked about social reality: the *epistème*, to use Michel Foucault's term. Let us call this the *epistemic dimension* of sociological knowledge. *Epistèmes* themselves are social facts that represent the relations of domination in the given society. The master example is Foucault's own account of the history of Western science and its ways of relating human culture and nature. It evolved from classifying and representing the natural world, including humans, in the natural history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the study of exchange and utility in Mercantilist and Physiocratic economics, to the focus on work in classical economic theory, and finally to the complete separation between

human and natural sciences towards the end of the nineteenth century. A similar example is Ian Hacking's analysis of the discovery of probability and stochastic processes in the early nineteenth century. This opened up whole new areas of scientific research concerning populations and mass phenomena. Such grand transformations of the epistème reflect society's interests in itself and its natural environment in wide philosophical terms, but as the three examples above point out, the kinds of questions society asks of itself are also reflected in research designs in a smaller scale, and the designs and questions themselves tell us something important about society.

Third, sociological studies report through their form and scientific practice quite special facts about society, namely facts about the relationship between sociologists themselves and the object of their study. This we can call the *positional*, or the *sociology of knowledge dimension* of sociological facts. The division of sciences into disciplines in itself is an important fact about the society that engenders it. The fact that social sciences are today separated from natural sciences, and split into sub-disciplines each with their own dominant styles of reasoning, is not simply a consequence of the accumulation of knowledge but it is also a real factor which has an impact on what new knowledge it can produce. Another division, especially important in sociology, is the way that scientific knowledge is entangled with but sometimes also opposed to practical knowledge about society, held by ordinary people, by policy-makers, by the media and other significant institutions.

All these three dimensions must be accounted for when we discuss the relationship between social science and social practice. Sociological studies should not be read only as reports about their objects, but symptomatically, as manifestations of the power fields of knowledge in which they operate, and of their relationships to these fields.

In all three respects the social sciences in advanced capitalist societies have undergone a transformation which we must clearly

understand to see precisely what practical role they potentially serve today.

## PLANNED ECONOMY AND MODE 1 SOCIAL SCIENCE

When the architect of the British welfare state, Sir William Beveridge, envisioned the state's role in the post-war society he considered that the 'spectacular achievements of the war-time planned economy' (Beveridge 1944: 120) measured by the GNP and employment should be applied in the economy in peace, which also could benefit from state regulation, and not only by means of income redistribution. The state's aim was no longer to minimise public spending but to optimise all spending in society, in regard to available labour power by means of 'manpower budgeting'. The state budget should be measured to maintain full employment but not to exceed the national manpower capacity. The Keynesian principle of full employment was translated into income equalisation in social policy and growth was its primary objective. Thus planning was not uniquely a Socialist idea; a plan designed and supervised by the centralised national state was a generally accepted European model of industrial development.

The planning did not only cover infrastructure, regional policy, monetary and fiscal policy, but also the ways in which people should lead their lives. The Swedish Alva and Gunnar Myrdal (1934) had in their famous population policy programme proposed that the state should root out bad habits among its citizens and teach them good manners. People had to be trained to take care of their households and bring up their children, although the important and complicated task of education should primarily be yielded up to professionals in nursery schools and other institutions. The state had to make people conscious of their real interests. Psychological research about happiness was needed to discover what makes life worth living according to people themselves, and the institutions of society should be formed on the basis of these observations.

The sociology associated with the *plan* was an exemplary case of what Gibbons et al. (1997) call Mode 1 science. Knowledge production in Mode 1 takes place at a distance from the context of application, as 'pure' science at the far end of the RD-continuum from research to 'development'. Mode 1 knowledge production respects rigorous disciplinary boundaries. Its canon of accountability and quality control dictates that only intra-disciplinary expert authority is qualified to judge the validity of knowledge, the merits of the scientists and the value of their work. Mode 1 science is enclosed in the universities, and – the authors claim in a second book – in fact not accountable at all in practical terms, such as outcomes in welfare or impact in policy effectiveness.

Nowotny et al. explain that the positivist virtue of a completely self-controlling, context-free science was cultivated in a context that had an unlimited appetite for meaning and certainty already from the eighteenth century, when Western society was experiencing an enormous wave of modernisation (2001: 63). The same explanation holds even more emphatically for the post-war decades in Western countries where progress, change for the better, lurked in the future biographies of not only the elites but of the great majority of people. Post-war industrialisation was particularly dramatic for Europe which, with the exception of England and Belgium, was still a continent dominated by small-holding agriculture on the eve of the Second World War. Germany, Denmark, Netherlands and Sweden all had well over one-fifth of their labour force employed in agriculture; Spain and the eastern countries including Finland had well over one-half. Thirty years turned first the west and then the central and eastern part of Europe to economies dominated numerically by the industrial working class, the peaks reaching up to almost half of the total (civilian) labour force (48.5 per cent in West Germany in 1970)<sup>1</sup>.

The post-war industrialisation produced a phenomenal growth in consumption possibilities with no parallel in human history, not relatively speaking and certainly not

in absolute terms. The earlier consumer booms of the eighteenth century in England (McKendrick et al. 1982; Mukerji 1983) and still in nineteenth-century Europe (Williams 1982) were limited to small elites, but the new industry-based consumer society was a phenomenon of the masses and encompassed the structural foundations of industrial society. In retrospect this change was so drastic that it has been given dramatic names, such as the European golden era (Therborn 1995), the golden years of capitalism (Hobsbawm 1994), the glorious thirty years (Fourastié 1979) or even the second French revolution (Mendras 1988). It changed the make-up and technology of everyday life. It reconfigured both social structures and people's way of thinking about themselves and about their relationships with others. It brought to ordinary people a quantity and diversity of goods, pleasures and uses of time that either had never existed before or had only been accessible to the very privileged. Luxury was democratised and became part of everyday life. The pleasures of consumption and sensuality became publicly presentable, in everyday life as well as in the media and in marketing, whereas they had earlier been excluded from public discourses and left to the private sphere. The Weberian values of industrial society – frugality, industriousness and achievement orientation – were replaced by post-industrial or post-modern values that stress pleasure for its own sake and cherish its public presentation as much as they spurn its public control. The Romantic ethos of capitalism seemed to get the upper hand.

At the same time parliamentary institutions were consolidated in all Western countries. Europe only gradually recovered from quasi-totalitarian war-time regimes, the USA from an era of ultra-nationalistic anti-communist suspicion. Value conflicts over religion, nationalism, the family, sexuality and many forms of consumption and culture gained political platforms and turned into protests and counter-protests or moral panics (Cohen 1972).

The appetite for meaning and certainty was not only of a psychological nature. The plan was a central instrument in progressive

national industrial policies, and the plan required reliable and impartial information for its material. Also the moral ambivalences needed to be formulated in a language and described more systematically than with anecdotal accounts by journalists and writers or movies. The appetite was not only for meaning and certainty; it was also for information.

Population statistics had already a solid foundation from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To a lesser extent this was true also for economic and labour statistics. However, household consumption data only began to become available in the 1950s. Income and mobility surveys have an even shorter history, and individual data on specific consumption patterns (such as alcohol), sexual behaviour, political opinions and attitudes about this or that aspect of everyday life, which today are routinely provided by Eurostat, European Science Foundation, and national statistical offices, or which are industrially produced and commercialised by private 'research' companies, were still in the 1960s a rarity provided by specially funded academic research programmes. All this information required a conceptual portrayal of society – a language to describe its direction of change, and to interpret its relevance.

Even though the epistemic dimension of the sociology associated with the plan was strongly normative – preparing the good life for all – any sociology of knowledge was an alien, if not hostile, idea to Mode 1 knowledge production. Science that speaks with the voice of disciplinary authority does not highlight its subject and its relationship with the reality it speaks about. To take an example from the natural sciences, the mapping out of the human genome is a collective project which advances at every new step independently of who makes that step and independently of what the consequences of the genome project will be for diagnostic practices, for treatment methods, for the lives of people with known genetic disorders, and for the lives of many other people who live with them. In the same way, one might think that if basic social science research could detect the determining

elements in human social conduct, it does not matter who participates in the production of that knowledge, and from what point of view.

Instead of engaging in the question of standpoints of knowledge, there was a strange cleavage between 'Grand Theory' and 'Abstracted Empiricism' (Mills 1959) prevalent in sociological texts of that era. The highly technical vocabulary of the former and the bureaucratic ethos of the latter appear quite distinct from each other, theory representing 'basic' or pure science with disinterested motives (beyond the interest in the establishment of the discipline itself) while the empirical researchers apply their measurements and methods to practical social issues of integration, cohesion, equality, crime prevention, youth work, health promotion etc. Neither theory nor empiricism left much room to *human agency*, with understandable aspirations, goals and hopes. For empiricist as well as theoretical sociologists, Mills argued, the object of knowledge is *social action* – what makes members of society act in a meaningful and orderly way *from the point of view of society*. According to Mills, it was the task of emancipating social science to help out people who 'need, and feel they need ... a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves' (p. 5). That quality of mind, the Sociological Imagination, is offered to them by the critical sociologist who is capable of using the classical tradition to translate private problems to public issues and vice versa.

## THE NEOLIBERAL TURN AND MODE 2 SOCIAL SCIENCE

By the 1970s social research in accordance with Mode 1 knowledge production was criticised increasingly often. One of the objects of critique was the problematic assumption about objective knowledge independent from the viewpoint of the knower. One solution has been to make explicit 'whose side we are on', as Howard Becker, the famous American

sociologist of deviant minorities, asked in 1966, and argued that it is the task of the sociologist to side with the ‘underdogs’, the drug users, prostitutes, ethnic minorities or extremely poor people. The voice of such people is not heard in the media; they are not seen in the halls of power, thus information about their lives must be produced by professional sociologists who are explicitly equipped with methodologies to make that information available (Becker 1970). But as Alvin Gouldner (1970) remarked in a famous and influential debate with Becker, such a position does not solve the problem itself, created by the division of labour between pure academic science and applied research. Being on the side of the underdog is in itself an ambiguous position. What is an underdog? There is always somebody above every overdog, and thus if we study drug users, for example, even the local police officer – an obvious overdog to the addicts – is under the authority of the police headquarters, of the municipal council, the President of the local Lions Club, and many others, not least the legislator who decided that drug use is illegal and thus a police affair. Moreover, Gouldner argued that even when sociologists take the underdog point of view they, knowingly or not, serve a constituency on whose interest their career possibilities depend.

A major blow to Mode 1 social science came from social constructionism, which pointed out that there cannot be any pure social science knowledge independent from ordinary people’s everyday knowledge about society. Anthony Giddens (1979: XXX) gave this point a famous formulation in his state-of-the-art review of social theory by saying that the twentieth-century trend in social science has been to increasingly account for the fact that people always already, without any interference from social scientists, possess enormous amounts of knowledge about society. A landmark volume to realize this had already appeared in 1966: *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann (1987). They had argued that not only do people know a great deal about

their society – obviously, in order to go to school, to be employed or be an employee, to be husband and wife, to make one’s way in modern traffic, to be a consumer, a political or a social citizen, one has to know a very complicated set of rules and norms – but that the whole social structure is based on such shared knowledge. Thus the proper approach to the analysis of social structure is not abstract measurement such as statistics on income distributions or class divisions but sociology of knowledge.

Once it was recognized that people know a great deal about social life, and that social scientists’ knowledge is part of the same ‘stock of social of knowledge’ in which other people also live, it is easy to dismiss Mode 1 science as an illusion. There is no pure social science, independent of the context of application, because the scientists’ knowledge is itself part of the context: it serves to define situations, to conceptualise social issues and to establish selections of feasible policy options, to exclude others and so on. Social sciences are permanently challenged by everyday thought, they cannot in actual fact justify themselves only with disciplinary canons, and their academic authority is constantly questioned. Such a view stresses the positional or sociology of knowledge – dimension of social science: scientific concepts, methods and language which produce and express facts also reflect the relationship between the scientists and their object, the people they study. Sociology committed to this view always faces what is called ‘the reflexivity problem’. If social reality is significantly influenced by what people think or believe about it, and these beliefs are influenced by the believers’ interests, social scientists contribute to the shaping of this reality in a way that also is infected with their interests. In what way, then, can sociologists claim that their knowledge is superior or somehow less influenced by their situation than other knowledge? Berger and Luckmann said that sociology of knowledge is ‘like trying to push a bus in which one is riding’ (1987: 20). To pretend that disciplinary social science is

somehow neutral and virtuously outside of social reality, even in its basic theoretical part, is to make a fallacious claim of objectivity and a rather dubious attempt to cover up its partiality.

When Giddens made his observation that social sciences tend towards a recognition of the importance of everyday knowledge, he was in fact pointing at a major change in the relationships between social science and social practice that was occurring in *all* its three dimensions: representational, epistemic and sociology of knowledge in the post-positivist transition. In representational terms, the so-called cultural, semiotic or linguistic turn drew sociologists' attention to critical analyses of meaning in peoples' everyday life, in the media, in cultural products and also in social science itself. In Erik Allardt's terms (2006), the hermeneutic pole in social science gained dominance vis-à-vis its complementary opposite, the positivist vision. It was observed that beyond what was taken for facts there is a complex web of communication, from statistics collectors' concepts and classifications, to respondents' interpretations and responses to them, to statistical analysis and interpretation of results by researchers and by their readers. No part in this web can be taken for granted as evident and obvious. In cultural and media studies the same ambiguity of meaning appeared in many forms. Semioticians talked about the 'referential fallacy' (Greimas and Courtès 1979), media researchers focused on the user perspective i.e. the interaction between the media and the audience (Sulkunen and Törrönen 1997; Alasuutari 1999), and literary criticism followed Roland Barthes (1977: 142–48) in believing that the 'author is dead' – the 'meaning' of literary texts escapes the intentions of their authors, in the extreme case it even escapes the text itself. Meaning became a problem, the object of study, the referent, instead of being simply the medium of facts.

Why? It has by now become established that the end of the 1970s marked an end of a historical period in advanced capitalist countries if we look at it from the perspective

of the principles of governance. Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (1992) have associated this change with the Foucauldian idea of governmentality, the internalisation of power by its subjects in modern society, and found its locus in the changing role of the state. Since then, an extensive literature has demonstrated that essential reforms in public management (itself a new term signalling the change) have taken place in advanced capitalist states, at times to a point where the state seemed to be withering away from capitalism altogether. Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (1999), on the other hand, have studied business management doctrines and found that a similar reorganisation has taken place in the private sector even earlier. In fact, the new style of governance has shifted from business to public management with more or less success. Michael Power (1997) has confirmed this phenomenon and used the term *The Audit Society* to describe the essential change that has occurred to the role of social sciences in the new mode of power: evaluation, of which auditing is one especially important part. Using the term coined by Gibbons and associates (1997), it depicted the change from Mode 1 to Mode 2 knowledge production. In contrast with Mode 1 'pure' science, Mode 2 knowledge production takes place in the context of application; it is trans-disciplinary and it is directly accountable also on grounds of its practical usefulness (Nowotny et al. 2001: 220).

Boltanski and Chiapello concluded that by the mid 1970s industrial life had entered a deep management crisis in all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. The bureaucratic management structures that had been copied from the military were inadequate for performance and unacceptable from the point of view of the increasingly educated labour force. The response was to create more democratic participatory work organisations, flexible employment schemes, subcontracting, autonomous quality circles or teams, outsourcing and competition within companies. The new organisational form was no longer the hierarchy but the network, and its

node was the project: a task-based uniquely funded team with autonomous leadership, targets and a deadline. Control was no longer directed from central management down to the divisions, departments and the shop-floor stewards; from now on it was not only internalised in the employees' own individual interest but also externalised to peers and to competitive relationships between operational units and profit centres.

The public management doctrines that were adopted in a short time-span in the mid 1980s in the OECD and its member countries applied the same principles to state and local government. Similar problems of bureaucratic management were to be eliminated as in the private sector, but a moral dimension was also important: citizens should no longer be seen as subjects of the state; they were put in the position of clients, and the public service-providing agencies were re-organized to meet requirements that are often called *the three Es*: *Economy* (ensuring the best possible terms for endowed resources, implying competition between service producers), *Efficiency* (producing more value for money) and *Effectiveness* (ensuring that outcomes conform to intentions) (Power 1997: 50). The central government is no longer authorized to issue norms to local officials and service producers such as hospitals, schools, day care services etc. but only information and advice, and resources now measured to output rather than needs.

### FROM THE GOOD LIFE TO GOOD PRACTICES

Governance – or management, borrowing again the language from the business world – by information is often used to describe the new power structure. A better term to highlight the moral dimension of the change would be 'governance by programmes' or 'frameworks which have replaced the plan'. The moral and political authority of the state does not suffice to define what the good society is, what kind of life is good or bad or how to solve the problems.

There is no willingness to prescribe norms of how and what we should or should not do. Nevertheless, the political responsibility has to be attested and the officials have to be given grounds for decisions about how to direct the state's money to different purposes, among other things. Frame laws and programmes that define goals, recommendations for programmes and criteria for standards are needed to achieve the purposes mentioned above. In very many areas supra-national bodies define the targets. For example in European Union framework programmes are formulated on many issues: development of technology, employment, prevention of exclusion, regional development, promotion of health, prevention of drug problems and harmonization of education and many other things. These are again translated to national strategies, policy programmes and eventually to short-term action plans. Local and regional governments insert these to their own objectives and action plans. The formulations of these goals are of very general nature in the programmes and their accentuations usually correspond to those of the general public administration thinking: in alcohol and drug programmes the goal is the responsibility of citizens themselves, initiative, networking and relying on the support of neighbourhood communities, to name just a few.

From the epistemic point of view, governance by programmes and frameworks rather than plans means that society asks itself different kinds of questions than before. Social sciences that were attached to the plan were expected to say what happens if we do X, and what should be done to make Y happen. Now the questions are: in regard with the *three Es*, which of the projects A, B, C ... N meet best the objectives of the Programme? For example, the objective might be to minimise alcohol-related problems. The central government does not have the means at its disposal to reduce alcohol consumption in the country, or is reluctant to use such policy instruments (price increases, permitted hours of sale and other regulations of the market); instead it asks local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs),

businesses, labour unions, churches etc. to establish innovative projects and have them evaluated for economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Sulkunen 2006).

The central concept in goal and framework management: 'innovation', has been used in the science and technology policy already for a long time. The administration cannot predetermine the results of the researchers or the direction of the development interests of companies, but it can take a stand on the direction of the development in general and make strategic policy definitions. New ideas come from the 'grassroots level', from field workers and citizens themselves. Transferred to social policy, the pattern of 'innovation thinking' has assimilated traits of romantic rationalism: people are thought to be creative and the solutions have to be given space to develop and grow upwards from down under. The researchers should evaluate and strengthen these tendencies instead of planning. The primary tasks of evaluation are surveillance of expenses and ensuring quality and supervision of observance of rules and regulations: tasks which used to belong to inspectors and superintendents of state governance. Often they include, though, more ambitious goals of generalisation, which are called recognizing good practices.

The expressions 'good practice' and 'what works' originate from prison administration (Garland 2001), and from there they have spread to social work and public administration in general. This manner of speech is an application of solution-oriented therapy or pedagogy, which detaches itself from analysing reasons of problematic behaviour and instead concentrates on the recognition of the effects of alternative action models. The search for reasons is, according to this perspective, not only a waste of time but it might also have negative implications. When criminals learn about the causes of their behaviour, those causes become 'vocabularies of motive', justifications and rhetoric for escaping responsibility (Sykes and Matza 1957).

The recognition of good and working practices is an effort in pragmatic thinking. The behaviour of a person is a sum of such

complicated factors, that the practical social work in prisons, for example, cannot commit only to one or a few explanation models and their conclusions concerning *clients*. It is more useful to observe the effects of the existing methods of *social work itself* and choose the methods that seem functioning and cost-effective. The innovation thinking is dressed in the rhetoric of good practice, and it leans to a sort of new social Darwinism. Clients and employees are given free hands to invent new kinds of action models, mutations, and eventually the most fit among them are chosen for additional refining on the basis of expert reports. Evaluation is then considered the unbiased and unemotional mechanism of social and natural selection.

The other side of pragmatic thinking is moral neutrality. Assumption that the methods of social work or the alternatives for control policies could be evaluated only in regard of their functionality and effectiveness, presupposes a strong unanimity of goals – the employment, health and security of the population being considered good objectives and repeated offences a bad one, for example. In programme rhetoric neutrality leads to abstracticism and definitional – and at the same time administrative – ambiguity. Promotion of health is a good example of this. Another is management of security. This rhetoric calls the acts of officials with a general name that has a morally neutral flavour. It is easy for everyone to accept, but at the same time it expands the range of goals of the officials and experts and blurs the boundaries of their actions. The other moral point of views related to the matter – the customers' freedom of choice or the sense of justice of many citizens demanding more severe punishment for criminals, for example – can be forgotten from the standpoint of effectiveness.

## THE FICTIONS OF EVALUATION RESEARCH

From the point of view of the sociology of knowledge, governance by programmes positions the sociologist in a new relationship

with social practice, exactly like Nowotny et al. (2001) describe it as characteristic of Mode 2 knowledge production. Social research operates in the context of application; it is not constrained by disciplinary boundaries and the criteria of its accountability are less academic than practical: tell us what works, and we shall be pleased *not* to know why something else might *not* work.

If the idea of 'pure science' in the positivist Mode 1 knowledge production was an illusion, but an illusion in a real context with real consequences, are the ideals of Mode 2 social science more realistic and convincing? To some extent the answer is positive: social science that operates in a context and is aware of its own vested interests is more honest about itself and potentially also more relevant than social science built on the fiction of basic science and applied research. However, also Mode 2 science attached to the programme rather than to the plan has its illusions, as real as the fiction of Mode 1 science but in a different context and with different consequences. The first illusion arises from the logic of governance by programmes itself: abstract objectives.

Programme and evaluation rhetoric make politics look rational, and hierarchical decision-making, just like business management. But what does state need this rhetoric for? Why is it impossible for example for a ministry to decide on its strategy in alcohol policy and follow that strategy in financing and other solutions? One reason for this is the pursuit of political neutrality already discussed above. The ministry does not want to decide or it considers itself incapable to dictate how municipalities, organisations, companies – or other ministries – should act in order to decrease problems caused by alcohol consumption. To preserve the autonomy of those actors the policy goals are defined with abstract concepts, of which employment, health and security are the most central ones. It is always possible to reach unanimity concerning those goals, even though the moral or power resources would not always suffice to make concrete policy decisions. The rhetoric of 'what works' and

'best practices' reflects what we have called the Ethics of Not Taking a Stand, quoting a fieldworker we interviewed on how she advises parents to behave in the drug issue: 'The most ethical stand is not to take a stand at all, the parents should decide this for themselves' (Määttä et al. 2003).

Abstraction has also another legitimating function. It protects the sphere of intimacy, which was the historical goal of the welfare state: the self-responsibility of citizens, individual agency and commitment to good choices to promote a person's own health, security and well-being. This is not limited to rhetoric or ideological speech, but it is part of the everyday life of advanced capitalist society. For example the health care expert system is relatively helpless if the patient is unwilling to co-operate: 'only the medication that is taken will help'. But you cannot force anyone to co-operate. You cannot get overweight under control unless consumers eat less. Disciplining consumers' food choices directly would be felt as unacceptable paternalism. They will have to take responsibility for their own choices.

In programmes with very concrete targets such as weight loss the outcomes are easily measured. However, in many cases standards of performance are more ambiguous, and the audit or evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness is in fact a process of defining and operationalising them, often with perverse effects on the actual operation of the system. A good example is research evaluation. In theory, university departments and research institutes are expected to produce relevant good quality research, but the auditing criterion: articles published in refereed journals, leads to an increase in the number of such journals, with the consequence that fewer people read them and the social relevance of research results declines. Nevertheless, money is invested in them because the effective alternative, such as taxing food or alcohol, is not included in the repertoire of acceptable policies.

Governance by programmes and frameworks thus supports what Nowotny et al. (2001) consider the key features of the

Mode 2 science. Abstract objectives of evaluation research in the context of application encourage transdisciplinarity and pragmatic division of labour. When the interest is not directed at explaining behaviour nor even at the mechanisms of effects of the measures taken, but only at the effectiveness of the alternative action models, there is no need for the research of alcohol problems, youth culture or deviant behaviour but for skilful evaluation researchers who can flexibly move from one substance area to another. Corresponding abstracticism is visible in the training of fieldworkers and their division of work. As the French sociologist Robert Castel (1981: 135–44) has claimed, the professionalisation of social work has not actually led to the often anticipated medicalisation nor specialisation of other kind. Instead there has developed a paraprofessional mixed type, the general task of which is social control.

The abstracticism of goal and framework management has resulted in efficiency and effectiveness becoming passkey concepts that are applied everywhere. Sometimes, however, they misrepresent the reality that they are supposed to evaluate. For example, every society will need to take care of addicts in some way. For the clients' welfare as well as for the institutions – the police, social offices, penal and medical institutions – the most relevant questions relate not to outcomes in terms of recovery but to the division of labour between controlling and helping professions. This, however, is not an issue of performance but of ethics and values. Constrained to evaluating efficiency and effectiveness, Mode 2 social science may in fact sustain inefficient responses instead of asking pragmatically relevant questions about their rationale.

### **THE RETURN OF CAUSALITY AND ITS OLD PROBLEMS**

The second illusion of the new mode of practical social science arises from the requirements of efficiency and effectiveness. Both are based on the notion of causality. The concept of

effect is a part of the equipment of science, as well as of everyday thinking. We light the lamp, roast the ham, start the car, give an advice to another person or call a meeting assuming on the basis of our prior experience, that a certain state of affairs will follow. We do not usually ask why it results from that action. Only when the lamp does not get lighted, the ham does not roast or advice or invitation are not followed, do we start investigating the error. Even then we don't have to know much about the mechanisms of the causal chain, but we can lean on our prior experience. We routinely change the bulb, check the fuse and the position of the ignition key or whether our advice or invitation has actually been received. Only in very exceptional circumstances do we have to lean on expert support, that is to say we utilise research-based knowledge to explain the mechanism between the cause and the effect and this directs us to look for the error in the different parts of the chain.

In evaluation research the primary interest of knowledge is similar to our everyday causal thinking. The interest of knowledge is to establish general laws about social life and to verify whether the action causes the desired effect or not. This could be called clinical causal thinking. Its objective is not to explain the mechanisms of effects, but only to test pragmatically if they are there, how much they vary and are there possibly some ill effects. Medicine that is based on evidence and the medicine-influenced social policy of the same type are examples of clinical causal thinking<sup>2</sup>. Still, clinical causal thinking has similarly limiting logical conditions as the causality tests of the research laboratories. The cause and the effect have to be logically independent and empirically dependent on one another; the cause factor has to be adjustable in an unambiguous and measurable manner; and the effect of other variables has to be eliminated experimentally or statistically. Also there have to exist unambiguous means for measuring the effect, which has to follow the cause temporarily.

Some clinical medical research is able to come up with these expectations. The medication will stay the same in spite of who it is

given to and who hands it out, and the human body is approximately the same in different circumstances. Usually it is possible to control the effect of differences with the reliability that meets the expectations of the practice. In social work and social policy the conditions of clinical research can be measured up only in exceptional circumstances. As Tom Erik Arnkil and Jaakko Seikkula (2005: 60) have claimed, a psychosocial work does not move from a certain place, actor or situation to another remaining the same, as medication. No 'method' or 'model' can be independent of the agent who delivers it, who receives it, or that would be conceptually independent of the effect it aims at.

Evaluation is usually performed in a situation, where a test or even comparative configuration of any kind is not possible. Ordinarily the evaluator is contacted when the funding of the project has already been granted, its staff and principal idea are decided, and the fieldwork of the project has already partly started. Some vested interests have already been created, the goodwill mission is an inspirational source for action, and there is no time or resources for comparison presupposed by a real evaluation of effectiveness. The expectation of establishing causality turns into a thin fiction.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this article I have discussed the relationship of social science to social practice, and argued that a radical paradigm shift occurred in the 1980s in all advanced capitalist countries from the positivist mode associated with the idea of the plan to a more context-based science attached to governance by programmes and frameworks. The change reflects the new practices of governance that were introduced at the same historical period in the business world as well as in public management. In social science knowledge production the shift corresponds to a transition from what Gibbons et al. (1997) call a transition from Mode 1 to Mode 2 science.

This shift has had implications at three levels: referential (what is studied), epistemic (what kinds of questions are asked) and sociology of knowledge in a narrow sense (position of scientists in relation to the object of their research and to those whose knowledge needs they serve).

I have also argued that Mode 1 social science was a deviation rather than a long tradition in modern social science. It was associated with governance by plan in the post-war decades of state-driven industrialisation and construction of the welfare states. It had important functions in providing a conceptual portrayal of society and the theoretical framework for growing needs for monitoring and information, which now are mostly covered by information systems other than the social sciences. However, Mode 1 social science was also an illusion, and many social scientists and critics were aware of this.

The shift to Mode 2 science was a reaction to internal developments within the social sciences but more importantly it reflects the epochal change in the logic of governance in capitalist societies from the plan to programmes and frameworks. This change is deeply rooted in the structure of capitalist societies which stress individuality and autonomy of agents. Fixity on abstract targets, good practices and causal relationships in Mode 2 science are fictions too, but on the other hand, science which is aware of its own context has a greater critical potential and capacity to act as 'public sociology' than a discipline that is divided between pure science and applied research.

## NOTES

1 Therborn 1995, table 4.4, p. 66, and table 4.6, p. 69.

2 The so-called Cochrane-library collects the results of clinical treatment research, evaluates their validity and draws conclusions on the probabilities of the effects of the methods. Corresponding work has been done in social policy under the name of Campbell-cooperation.

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