

In Defence of Social Science: U.K. 2015

A Review of the 2015 CfSS Report: 'The Business of People: The Significance of Social Science over the Next Decade'

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In 1954, C. Dollard wrote an article in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* titled 'In the Defense of Social Science'. In 1967, W. Grundy wrote another article in the journal of *Social Studies* with the same title. A report from the New York Times used the same title in 1985 to highlight how neglected the social sciences are in the American education system (Maeroff 1985). Most recently, in 2012 B. Maguth also draws on the same title to write an article examining the need to incorporate social sciences in STEM education. The list goes on and on; defending the social sciences across the spectrum of education has a long history in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Making a case for why the social sciences are vital and deserve recognition through funding is, unfortunately, not a novel campaign.

In February 2015 the Campaign for Social Sciences (CfSS) in the United Kingdom published a report titled 'The Business of People: The Significance of Social Science over the Next Decade'. Since 2011 the Campaign for Social Sciences has worked actively to promote and advance public recognition for the social sciences. The campaign lobbies for the inclusion of social scientists in the government, funding and spotlights social science research in the media and to the broader public. With the help of the Academy of Sciences and Sage publications, among other funders, the CfSS established a working group to write and publish a report in the defence of the social sciences.

Although it has a different title, the report echoes similar sentiments to past battles fighting for the importance, value and recognition of the social sciences. The report makes a clear recommendation for a 10 per cent increase in social science budget beyond inflation

over the next parliament. According to one estimate in the report, U.K. social science is grossly valued at 25 billion pounds (CfSS 2015: 25). The 'Business of People' argues that the current monetary value of investments in social sciences is extremely low in relation to the value of social science impact. It is very clear that the report aims to capture the attention of MPs, ministers, shadow ministers and their advisors (ibid.: 16). Regardless of the election turnout, the report makes a case for protecting social science funding. However, after the results of the election the CfSS has a long road ahead. Over the last U.K. government term tuition fees increased threefold for students and entire departments have been cut. Hopefully, the CfSS can persuade the new parliament that U.K. social science is a worthy investment.

To make their case, the report diverges from past efforts by taking on a cost-benefit and market-oriented framing. It uses terms like 'maximizing potential', 'increasing growth' and 'understanding market behaviour' to justify the benefits of social science. Moreover, the report is divided into three sections: 'social science now', 'thinking ahead' and 'the business of social science'. As the last subsection and the overall title imply, this report staunchly frames social science as a business.

The specific case studies that reflect social science impacts are organised round the themes of 'Behaving better', 'Securing society', 'Economics' and 'Data'. As an example of how social scientists contribute to 'securing society', the report states 'Anthropologists and others are on the front line in Afghanistan and Iraq; they help analyse internet traffic, placing terrorism in a wider context of minority communities, discrimina-



tion, geographical isolation and economic opportunity' (ibid.: 19). Although, this contribution is controversial from within the wider anthropological community it is highlighted in an effort to appeal to the target audience, which is not for the most part anthropologists.

As one of the working group members of the report mentioned in an interview, 'we intend to represent a single voice for all social science'. Similarly, another member of the working group noted how important it is for the report to have a clear and coherent message. At the expense of diversity, messiness and complexity, the report is successful in making a singular point about what social science is, why it is important and how it should look in the future.

Overall the report makes a strong case for social science funding using the terms that MPs, ministers and advisors can appreciate. Armed with the tools of evidence-based research, quantitative methods for analysing 'Big Data' and interdisciplinary collaboration with the physical sciences, the report firmly defends the future of social science. There is a great rally behind the effort and it is clearly an important cause. However, what is lost when social scientists are forced to compromise their diverse perspectives, tensions and messy politics for the sake of a singular and coherent message? If successful in convincing the next parliament that this *kind* of social science is worth investing in, what will the diverse U.K. social scientists have to do to keep their end of the bargain?

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