

“The operation was successful but the patient died”

**The tale of social science research.
The fate of planning research?**

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“...people in this country have had enough of experts”

Knowledge.... for whose benefit?

“Although the potential exists [for universities] to respond to almost every issue on our formidable national agenda, the readiness to do so does not. **Most universities continue to do their least impressive work on the very subjects where society’s need for greater knowledge and better education is most acute.**”

Derek Bok (former President of Harvard) (1990)

“In public policy making, **many suppliers and users of social research are dissatisfied**, the former because they are not listened to, the latter because they do not hear much they want to listen to. ”

Charles Lindblom and David Cohen (1979, p. 1)

“In short, the university has primarily become ‘a place for professors to get tenured and students to get credentialed’.”

Cynthia Gibson (2001)

“Communities have problems, universities have departments”

OECD (1982)

Structure

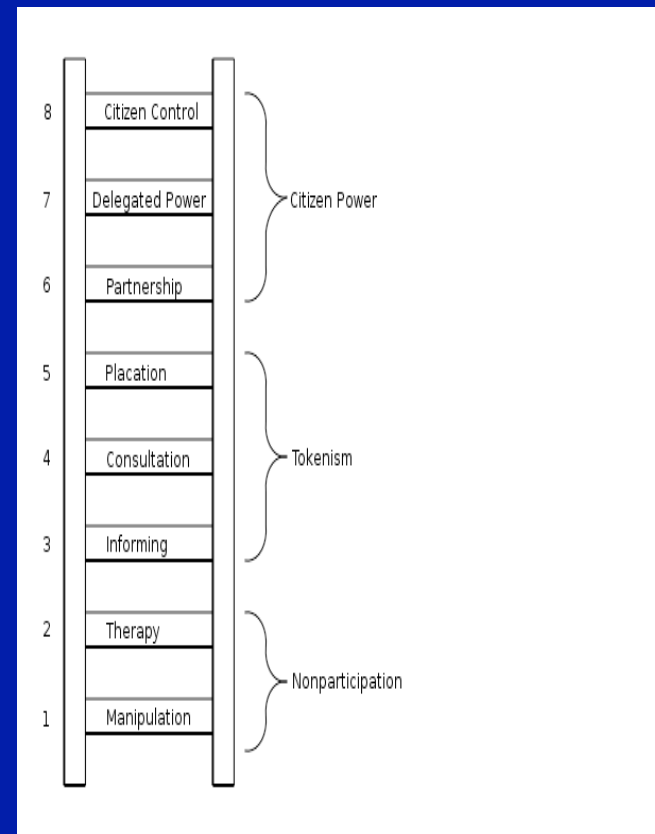
- What's the problem... some examples of social science research
- The nature of research
 - Forms of interaction
 - Questions being asked – ways of knowing
 - The test of 'good' (fundable) research
- Rethinking the knowledge project
- Concluding implications – the time for *planning* research is now

Social science research – 3 examples

- What is being exchanged?
- For whose benefit?

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Nature of research

- Forms of interaction
 - Extractive
 - Transactional
 - Interactive

Questions being asked – ways of knowing

- Ernest Boyer – scholarship of engagement
 - Discovery
 - What is to be known, what is yet to find? – **what and why**
 - Specialisation
 - Descriptive / analytical
 - Integration
 - What do the findings mean? How do they connect to the whole? – **how**
 - Synthesis – joining up
 - Application
 - How can knowledge be applied to practical problems? Can social problems provide an agenda for scholarly investigation? – **should**
 - Normative
 - Teaching

The test of 'good' (fundable) research

- Methodological rigour

“...if we care about improving practice, we have to pay attention to evaluative and normative questions of learning to be better practitioners, better actors in complex political and social contexts, questions that mainstream social science seems all too happy to avoid... So we are likely to find that... new methods need to reach far beyond the scope of “explanatory social science.” We may well find that if we wish to learn to practice more astutely – as we seek justice, beauty, efficiency - ... conventional social science has had us waiting in the bus station for our plane. Little wonder it hasn’t come.”

(Forester, 2015: 147 and 148).

The test of 'good' (fundable) research

- Methodological rigour

“Over the decades since the 1960s, planning research published in top-ranked journals has become more scientific, with an emphasis on interpretation, description and explanation, rather than recommendation or explications for practice... Research topics are getting narrower and more specialized... Planning theory has become more complex and draws on a wider range of perspectives from outside of the discipline, but is not necessarily more relevant to issues of pressing importance for planning practitioners... Methodologically, it is especially challenging to carry out research which addresses ‘wicked problems’ with any level of validity or reliability, making it challenging to publish this research in general, non-specialist journals.”

(Siemiatycki and Siemiatycki, 2016: 1257).

“We have to rethink the knowledge
project”

Ahmed Bawa (2017)

Rethinking the knowledge project

“We recall that the first colleges of the Anglo-Saxon race were established to educate religious teachers. For a long time it was considered the religious mission of the educated to prepare the mass of the people for life beyond the grave. Knowledge dealt largely in theology, but it was ultimately to be applied and the test of the successful graduate, after all, was not his learning, but his power to save souls. As the college changed from teaching theology to teaching secular knowledge the test of its success should have shifted from the power to save men’s souls to the power to adjust them in healthful relations to nature and their fellow men. But the college failed to do this, and made **the test of its success the mere collecting and disseminating of knowledge, elevating the means into an end and falling in love with its own achievement.**”

(Jane Addams, 1899, *The Function of the Social Settlement*)

Rethinking the knowledge project

- Expanding the knowledge ecosystem
- Moving to more (genuinely) **interactive** forms of knowledge generation
 - More **meaningful questions**
 - **Partnerships** not projects
- Developing different ways of knowing
 - Beyond the empirical... description and analysis – what and why
 - To synthesis and the normative / ethical – **how and should**
- Getting beyond methods and assessment of desk-based narratives
 - **Ethical value** not just methodological rigour
- Embrace **flexibility** and **reflective learning**
 - Blueprints and technico-rational approaches don't work

Concluding implications – the time for *planning* research is now

“If you truly want to understand something, try to
change it”

Kurt Lewin (1939)

- **Active knowledge** not inert knowledge
- We can operate to enable the patient to live... but will we choose to?

N8 / ESRC Co-production Programme

- *Making knowledge that matters: realising the potential of co-production*
 - <http://www.n8research.org.uk/research-themes/co-production/> - Co-production page
 - <http://www.n8research.org.uk/news/2015/3/co-producing-knowledge-the-future-of-social-science> - Press release
 - <https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/funding/knowledge/impact-and-benefits/2015/3/coproducing-knowledge-the-future-of-social-science.html> - Research Professional