HSDRGPID-10/UNUP-62

BASIC HUMAN NEEDS:

METHODOLOGY AND MOBILIZATION

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CONTENTS

SOCIAL METHOD AND SOCIAL PLANNING

A basic needs approach to social development has been defined as a process of identifying and promoting the interests of disadvantaged groups, if necessary against opposition from those whose interests will be threatened by the redistribution of power and resources implied by and attendant upon this process (Healey 1978).

As Marx indicated long ago, the disadvantaged do not spontaneously develop a consciousness of their interests together with a knowledge of how those interests may be advanced. Such a consciousness only develops through actual political practice:

> Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organization to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power, i.e., the political power of the ruling classes, it must at any rate be *trained for this* by continual agitation against this power. . . . Otherwise it remains a plaything in their hands. [Marx 1970, pp. 673-674, my emphasis.]

It is clear that basic needs analysis is an active process of social change in which the role of the social scientist qua researcher (and "trainer" in Marx's terms) must also be defined in active terms if the analysis is to have any chance of success in bringing about redistributive structural transformations.

Both substantively and methodologically the social sciences, particularly sociology, have been under detailed review in recent years. Substantively, the review has consisted of a greater awareness of the reflexive political and social role of sociology, and a decrease of assurance about the technical competence of sociology to merely reflect an objective social reality. Methodologically, the review has been demonstrated by a dissatisfaction with formal models of science, and research techniques based upon social surveys, computer analysis, and statistical procedures.

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The scientific and political crisis of sociology has been particularly reflected in its methodology, and Bell and Newby (1977, p. 21) suggest that the common themes running through sociology's private troubles can be subsumed under the general heading of the assault on positivism.

This assault has come both from within the sociological tradition, as a concern about data reliability rather than validity,* and from outside the tradition with a more fundamental rejection of the positivist framework coupled with the development of alternative approaches. These alternative approaches divide into those that share certain assumptions with positivism, particularly that thought (or analysis) and action for social change should be separated, and those that disagree fundamentally with this position and seek to unite thought and action for change in a more politically responsible social science.

Conventional debates about methodology in the social sciences have reflected conflicting views about the nature of social explanation arising either from different areas of social science (e.g., sociology, economics, anthropology, history: synchronic/diachronic analysis) or from different schools within social science (e.g., ethnomethodologists, the positivists, and so on). For social planners, including those concerned with development issues, however, the problems of methodology are of a somewhat different order, even though these are of no less significance, and raise issues of far greater complexity. For the social planner methodology is the link between a theoretical understanding of social structures and processes, and social action for change defined operationally (in one way) as social policy.

Social policy has tended to be equated with welfare policy in social science, but here it has a broader meaning within a social planning context. For our purposes the word *policy* can be taken to refer to the principles that govern action directed towards given ends. The concept denotes action about means as well as ends, and it therefore implies change: changing situations, systems, practices, behaviour (Titmus 1974, pp. 23-24).

In other words, *policy* refers to one aspect of the process of normative social planning. Gans (1972, p. 104) distinguishes three levels of normative social planning:

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* *Reliability* is taken to mean the correspondence between data and real world situations, including some conception of intervention for change in situations. *Validity* refers to only the logical consistency of the methodological process which produces data. As in formal logic validity does not guarantee the truth content of data and conclusions drawn from them.

a. the societal goal, which is any kind of goal adopted by the government for the society;

b. societal planning, which is concerned with evaluating social goals and developing the kinds of programmes to achieve the goals chosen; and

c. social programming, which may be defined as the programmes for goals adopted by societal planners.

Apthorpe applies a similar framework to development, which he defines as ". . . the possibility of conscious or deliberate attainment in the short run of desired goals or targets" (1970, p. 3).

At one level the perception of society is a theoretical activity, and definitions of existing social conditions and social problems will flow from theoretical understandings of social structures and social processes. Social goals and social action are also determined by the political relationships of a society, and over time will not predictably reflect any one set of social theories. Nevertheless, the perception of social problems theoretically defined will at least relate to, if not underpin, social goals at the political level, and will also define the area of action of programmes flowing from policies to deal with those problems. In other words, we try to put right those things which we can see as problems and which it seems appropriate to us to correct, given all the competing demands upon social resources made by different problem areas.

SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL DATA

Normative social planning requires information based on systematic investigations. Information provides both the empirical analysis of social problems and the input of data to the policy-formulation process. In this context methodology must be defined as the *total* collection of investigatory devices and skills that can be brought to bear upon the task of informing the normative planning process. Methodology is the means by which theories are made operational and tested, social problems are examined, and alternative policies are evaluated. It is the means by which uncertainty is minimized in the planning process through systematic testing of hypotheses derived from a theory.

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This definition of method is broad and pragmatic: it includes in it any and all techniques of informtion collecting within social planning processes. In information collecting for social planning purposes it is often better to speak of investigation rather than research and of information rather than data, for the latter terms imply a certain kind of formal rigour which, it will be argued below, is often lacking in this activity.

For the academic sociologist, however, methodology is commonly defined in terms of a formally rigorous approach. As Mitchell (1967, p. 17) has indicated defensively from the position of the anthropologist, sociological methods are assumed to involve schedules, questionnaires, and statistical procedures.

The procedures described by Mitchell are the tools within social science associated with statistical probability techniques of data collection and analysis. The lure of the procedures associated with statistical probability techniques is that they appear to represent for sociology a means of employing the scientific method in the investigation of social events in as rigorous a fashion as natural science employs it in laboratory experiments in the investigation of natural events.

Natural science has some time since overcome the problem of the separation of theory from empirical enquiry that still taxes the imagination of sociologists. The hypothetico-deductive method of science proceeds from theory to testing in a process which brings together intuition, formal logic, and rigorous empirical procedures: This consists of the formation of a relevant hypothesis, deductive elaboration of its consequences, and testing by observation or experiment whether these consequences occur or not (Madden 1960, p. 7).

Statistical probability techniques together with random sampling have appeared to offer the solution to the problems of carrying out properly scientific experiments and investigations in social science. Kerlinger presents this point of view very forcefully in his discussion of social and behavioural research: "It is *impossible* to do competent research or to read or understand research reports without understanding the probabilistic and statistical thinking of the scientists" (1973, p. 120, my emphasis).

The layout of most textbooks on methodology clearly reflects the requirements of research conducted within this model. The first part of the text will typically discuss data collection, perhaps having dealt in passing with the nature of the scientific method,

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and the second half will cover techniques of data processing and analysis up to the level of multivariate analysis in the more advanced texts.* Such texts do in fact represent rather nicely the actual sequence of the stages of research in that unless a researcher has adequately negotiated the steps in the first half of the book, he should not venture into the rarified atmosphere of the second half. The first part indicates the type of information required and, more importantly, the requisite quality and reliability of the information for the operation of the techniques demonstrated in the latter part.

THE DATA PROBLEM

Assuming that the problem-identification stage of research leads to the formulation of testable hypotheses, the researcher is faced with the question of where information can be obtained to investigate the research problem. In general there are three sources: official statistics, other research findings, or the collection of original data.

The examination of official statistics and other research findings is an essential first step in empirical research, and the problems with both types of information have been discussed at length in the literature on research procedures. (See, for example, Stacey [1973], chap. 3, pp. 35-49.) For many purposes it is necessary to go beyond existing data to the collection of the original information.

In the collection of information there are two broad alternatives: the researcher either asks everyone everything, or he asks some people some things. Given that the first is not usually practicable, some form of sampling is usually resorted to. In order for data collected through sampling procedures to be of sufficient quality for statistical manipulation, the principle of randomness must be observed. As Kerlinger says, "The notion of randomness is *at the core* of modern probabilistic methods in the natural and behavioural sciences" (1973, p. 120, my emphasis).

Galtung states the problem of sampling very cogently:

* Johan Galtung's widely used textbook (1969) illustrates this point very well.

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In general the problem of sampling can be stated as follows: given (1) the set of units to be studied, (2) that the set has M elements, and (3) that for several reasons only m elements or units will be studied — how do we select the m units? If we have M = m there is no problem. Only if for some reason often expressed as a lack of resources (energy, finance, time) m < M does the problem of *selection* arise. [1969, pp. 48-49.]

The strength of random sampling procedures is that it is possible to generalize beyond a random sample to the total population that the sample is drawn from.

The requirement to generalize beyond the sample raises the issue of the representativeness of the sample, and it is representativeness that is guaranteed by adhering to procedures of random selection. With random samples we can generalize and make predictions with reference to the general universe from which the sample is drawn. Also with random samples it is possible to test the reliability of the data and any conclusions drawn from the data concerning the universe from which the sample is drawn.

Within sociology, therefore, methodological rigour has generally been equated with the application of this formal data collection model. Other methods of social investigation are discussed in the literature, but they tend to be viewed as more or less undesirable aberrations from the formal model. As Kerlinger again says, "While research can, of course, be done without using ideas of randomness, it is difficult to conceive how it can have viability and validity, at least in most aspects of behavioural scientific research" (1973, p. 130).

This same attitude has been manifested in the area of social problem and policy research. Tufte sets out the purpose of his text on *Data Analysis for Politics and Policy* as the demonstration of techniques of quantitive analysis in action on problems of politics and public policy. His orientation to this type of analysis "centres on fitting equations to data" (1974, p. ix). This quite naturally raises the question of the source of data for quantitive analysis.

Despite his strictures concerning the essential requirement in social research for data collected in accordance with the random sample model, Kerlinger admits that "simple random sampling is not the only kind of sampling used in behavioural research. Indeed it is *relatively uncommon*" (1973, p. 129, my emphasis). In investigations for social planning purposes, the formal model of research presented above is usually not adhered to. There are three important reasons why this is so.

THE ISSUE OF RELIABILITY: SAMPLING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In undertaking field research within the formal model of social research, the first step is always to define the population (Moser 1963, p. 49). Defining the population, however, can be a major problem. Galtung (1969, p. 154) has indicated that the problem is that the survey method can always count on considerable constraints when attempting to undertake investigations of the social periphery or of the social centre, the elite.

This means that, when dealing with the poor or the powerful, the survey method with its attendant battery of techniques will be of little value in research. One could add that, when dealing with issues that are of particular sensitivity for social, political, economic, or other reasons, this will also be the case.

The weakness of formal research techniques concerns the question of access. The administration of formal methodologies requires a high level of access to the groups and issues that are the subject of the research. This access has to be available at all stages of an investigation for it to produce results that are credible in terms of formal models of validity, and must include access to records and documents (the official statistics stage), access to interested, involved, and informed individuals (the searching and issue identification stage), and final and extensive access in producing, testing, and administering a formal research instrument (questionnaires and schedules) or in formulating and executing an experimental design in the research situation.

There are many influences in research situations that severely restrict access. Simple indifference on the part of potential respondents to research activities can be a major inhibiting factor. Not everyone shares a social science interest in social investigations, and many people are unwilling to allocate one of their scarce resources, time, to the often esoteric requirements of research, to the possible detriment of the problems and issues that occupy their everyday lives.

More significant, however, is the question of opposition from individuals and groups whose interests research may impinge upon. Social science tends to assume that the investigation of issues and problems, or the testing of academically derived theories, is an inherently desirable and defensible activity. In the real world of human affairs, however, information is not viewed as a neutral commodity but rather is increasingly being seen as

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something with actual or potential implications for the interests of individuals and groups. This is particularly the case in social science research where the *use* that may be made of research findings is not automatically *understood* by those who are supplying the information, nor is it under their *control*. Apparently innocuous research data can be used for a variety of purposes, many of which may prove to be in conflict with the interests of those who have supplied the information.

Not all social groups and institutions have been equally aware that information derived through research may be a threat to their interests rather than simply neutral or automatically beneficial. In general, the more powerless a group, an individual, or a country has been, the more open it has been to relatively free collection of research data. Powerful vested-interest groups tend to be aware of the necessity to identify their own interests clearly and then control access to all information and other material that may impinge on those interests. For this reason the public relations expert has been a product of the rich and powerful, not the poor and the impotent, even though recent years have seen a growth of awareness by previously powerless groups of the need to control access to information.

Restriction on access to research situations invalidates many if not most formal research techniques.

Where official records are not available, or key informants are unresponsive, it is not possible to identify key issues, problems, or variables in advance of undertaking formal collection of original data. Without an adequate definition of issues and key variables, the construction of an adequate research instrument is not possible. The administration of the research instrument similarly becomes highly problematic where restrictions of access make it difficult to define in any precise fashion the population of concern and to construct a sampling plan that will permit samples to be drawn that in any way correspond to the requirements of probability sampling. Defining issues and a population with which those issues can be operationalized and examined is one of the most intractable problems of social research. There are many situations in which issues and populations are undefinable either because the members of the population consciously restrict research access or because the nature of the problem under examination means that the population is literally unknowable. Examples of the former situation would be research into the coalitions of powerful elites in both high- and low-income countries. The latter situation arises typically in research concerned with certain

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types of criminal activities, or in surveys of the victims of crimes where the only way to determine the characteristics of a population is to permit it to define itself. In low-income rural-based countries, defining a population can be a major problem because even basic information about the population at large may be lacking. Applying formal survey methods to such a situation can give a spurious impression of rigour in a context which in reality is characterized by a high level of uncertainty of information.

The survey method and indeed all methods based upon a formally rigorous model of enquiry are limited therefore to the middle range of social positions and can investigate adequately only those issues and problems which arise from this middle range. Outside the middle range of positions it will generally not be possible adequately to define or survey the population of interest or to identify those issues which it would be most useful to include in a data collection exercise.

Fortunately sociologists often do want to investigate issues such as the composition and activities of the power elite, or the nature of population aspirations to development and the obstacles these face. Methodologically, there is little guidance within sociology concerning the most effective procedures for undertaking such investigations. Generally the procedures that are described are represented as little more than somewhat rigorous investigatory journalism, and a central problem of methodology — how data may be generalized from a sample to the total population — is seldom tackled.

Alternative sampling procedures are available, of course, but these generally suffer adverse comparison with random sampling. Such techniques as quota sampling, judgemental or purposive sampling, accidental sampling, or snowball sampling are in the main seen as weak alternatives to random sampling. Even techniques such as areal or systematic sampling are generally considered to be discrepant with strict probability sampling, and make the application of inferential statistics problematic. (Black and Champion [1976, chap. 8, pp. 265-326] cover this issue in detail.)

Random sampling is used more as a scientific legitimation of research than a model for it, however, for the problems of drawing an adequate random sample mean that most samples deviate from the ideal of randomness. As Kerlinger says, "So-called accidental sampling, the weakest form of sampling, is probably the most frequent" (1973, p. 129). The rigours of the formal social scientific method are therefore much more disregarded than observed. In social problem research it is difficult, indeed, to see how it could be otherwise.

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There is an important point to be drawn from this discussion. Techniques of social investigation other than those formally defined as scientific in social science may be considered weak and unscientific. Yet, even on the basis of the formal model of scientific investigation itself, much if not most social science research falls short of the ideal, even though these deficiencies are often glossed over and do not hinder the acceptance of the results of research as rigorous and valid.

This criticism of the formal model is not an argument in favour of weaker methods of enquiry. It is an acknowledgement that methods which are appropriate to the investigation of issues of vital sociological concern may be in real terms no weaker than those practised in formally rigorous methodologies. In other words, methods appropriate to the examination of the social centre or the social periphery not only may be the only methods an investigator can use in those areas but are, practically speaking, as valid as any others.

THE ISSUE OF POLITICS: THE COST OF RESEARCH

The cost of research conducted within the formal model may make investigations impracticable. It is interesting that, when discussing the cost of research, even so politically conscious a sociologist as Johan Galtung tended in earlier writings to be concerned mainly with the trade-off between financial and methodological costs in pointing out that

> by sampling, one buys reduced "cost" of data collection, processing and analysis by using a lower N than the universe has, but at the expense of adding one problem to the other problems offered by one's research: that of deciding whether propositions established by the sample can be generalized to the universe. [1969, p. 51.]

The financial cost of conducting even random sample surveys, let alone total population surveys, is extremely high. For this reason it is the political and social costs associated with the financial cost that are the significant limiting factors. The problem of the cost of research is indeed inextricably bound up with the politics of the research. Galtung does indicate this:

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> . . . the modern methodology of extensive research with a higher number of units in general presupposes *readily available resources*, in terms of money, energy, time and manpower. . . . Thus there are interrelations here between method, very basic ideology, and the social structure of social research. [Ibid., p. 21, my emphasis.]

The costs of formally modelled research are historical and structural as well as financial. In addition certain analytical tools may carry high political costs because of the nature of the assumptions that underlie them.

When speaking of formal methodologies, it is useful, following Illich (1974), to conceptualize them as *high energy*, where energy is a general term representing all the inputs which are required for the operation of the methodology, both in the immediate research situation and historically.

Historically, the costs of formal methodology reside in the training and preparation of the methodologist. Closer to the time of the research these costs reveal themselves in the detailed preparation of the research programme which can only be carried out by those who have undergone the required training. The structural component of this historical cost derives from the stratified nature of social systems which differentially afford opportunity to undertake this specialized training. This produces a research establishment which is hierarchical and isomorphic with the general stratification system (an alpha structure). If one adds to this the very high financial cost of running research according to the formal model, it is obvious that only those with access to substantial resources historically and in the contemporary situation can undertake research which according to the canons of methodological rigour in sociology is truly *scientific*.

The historical and structural costs of research cannot be eliminated simply by donating a research grant to those who lack the skills to do formal social science. What this inevitably leads to is the development of a research elite within bureaucratic organizations that do have the resources to conduct investigations within the formal model. This research elite, which will be drawn from corresponding social strata in the general social structure, will then assume responsibility for investigating the social problems of the lower social classes, and thereby will perpetuate the system of dependency and the hierarchy of social problem research. As Titmus remarked on one aspect of this process, "Quite a lot of money has been made from writing about poverty" (1974, p. 16). The more sophisticated the methodology of social research, the more apparent will be its social and political cost and the progressively *smaller* will be the number of people who can operate the methodology effectively.

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In planning research, formal modelling exemplifies this process par excellence. Drake demonstrates that this is true not only of highly abstract models of social and economic systems (or of human needs) but also of modelling in much more concrete planning contexts. As he says of urban transport models, "The clients of transport modelling must have money. . . . the question is whether it is desirable to spend so much on modelling per se is something else again" (1973, p. 39).

He goes on to suggest that modelling may be better understood as an aspect of an elitist research and planning establishment rather than as a necessary, let alone *effective*, tool for the solution of social problems.

> It might be said (with due apologies) of computer based transport modelling that "Never before in the history of human conflict has more money been spent, by more people with less to show for it." It certainly involves conflict since all too often the clients and the modellers end up in total disagreement concerning what was done, what was to be done, and who was to have done it. [Ibid., p. 1.]

A similar argument against the value of computer modelling has been made in the context of international development studies.

Undoubtedly the most famous use of sophisticated computer models to make predictions about the course of world development is that of the Club of Rome in the "Limits of Growth" study. The impact of the predictions of the Club of Rome's report was considerable, arguing as they did in favour of deliberate actions to bring about a zero economic growth rate if technological, demographic, and industrial catastrophes were to be averted (Meadows et al. 1975).

The Club of Rome's thesis demonstrates that the deductive validity of a formal logical model in no way guarantees its truth value in real world situations. Models are only as good as the assumptions upon which they are based and the data that is available for their operation. Questionable assumptions or dubious quality or use of data can render the conclusions of even the most rigorous model contentious or at worst absurd.

Ul Haq decided after a detailed examination of the Club of Rome's model that many assumptions in the model were not scientifically established and that use of the data was often careless and casual.

He went on to indicate the highly political nature of the modelling exercise by pointing out the lack of consideration that the Club of Rome gave to the real distributional issues between rich and poor nations created by a zero growth policy, which he saw as a policy of despair for the poor. He concluded that the modelling exercise was of little direct value because, although the Club of Rome expressed certain reservations about both the technical and political shortcomings of the model, "many of the redeeming qualifications that the authors mentioned were not pursued by them and were generally lost in their anxiety to make their predictions as dramatic as possible" (Ul Haq 1970, p. 90).

The point is not simply that methodologies such as modelling may be ineffective but that, even if effective, they can be said to be ideologically undesirable. The fact that Drake and Ul Haq, after reviewing modelling in two diverse fields, can conclude that modelling is also of dubious efficacy tends to strengthen the view that these tools are in the main little more than the trappings and legitimations of bureaucratic research elites.

The ideological has become linked to the practical in recent years, especially in the field of development planning with the growth of demands for popular control of the planning process. The implications of this for the methods of social investigation is that the social and political costs of methods must now become part of the *explicit* framework for evaluating their acceptability, rather than the political implications of method being implicit in the assumptions and the structure of research. In other words, the social and political *products* of a method have become central criteria for the *scientific* evaluation of the method. Given that social scientific activity is always political directly or indirectly, political criteria are essential in the consideration of the work of social scientists.

It was the realization of the close relationship of the ideological and apparently technical that lead Illich (1970) to the conclusion that participatory democracy demands low-energy technology. In a research context this means that research tools must be of a kind directly accessible to the application and control of those who may be the willing or unwilling subjects of research.

Unfortunately, within social planning the implications of this position have not been worked out in any practical sense. Much less have they been worked out convincingly in terms of those interests that control the allocation of resources in social planning decisions.

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A political perspective on the scientific acceptability of research method does not mean that a magical and single new set of methods can be derived which will solve the problems of the ideology of method. Rather it means that the ideological implications of the work of social scientists and others involved in social planning have been made apparent, and it will no longer be possible to mystify this issue with rhetoric of technical procedures. In this sense it is not possible to solve ideological problems. All that is possible is to locate methodologies in the framework of ideology. The alternative, as Gouldner points out, is far from attractive:

> A blind or unexamined alliance between sociologists and the upper bureaucracy of the welfare state can only produce the market research of liberalism. It rests upon the tacit, mistaken, but common, liberal assumption that the policies of this bureaucracy equitably embody the diverse interests of the larger public, rather than seeing that the bureaucracy is one other interested and powerful contending faction, and is more closely allied with some of the contenders rather than equally distant from all. It is to values, not to factions, that sociologists must give their most basic commitments. [1973, pp. 67-68.]

For the sociologist actively involved in social planning, this requirement is of paramount importance.

SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The interplay of interest groups in the social research and planning process, and the consequences of this interplay for investigation procedures, raise a further point about the effectiveness of these procedures for advancing group interests or bringing about social change.

The issues that are defined as social problems worthy of solution, or the development goals that are seen as worth pursuing, will depend upon the social situation of the policy-maker. Information probably has a relatively small part to play in this process, especially where the policy-maker is attempting to make decisions concerning the allocation of limited resources between and amongst competing interests. In one aspect, this can be seen as a problem of allocating resources between and amongst different sectors of the total social, economic, and political structure. Economics can give no lead in this area,

for the market is a notoriously bad allocator of resources in terms of any equity criteria, and is, anyway, too open to manipulation by powerful interests. Also, economics has to admit that there is no *technical* (i.e., non-ideological) procedure for determining the allocation of resources between economic or social sectors.

Social planning decisions concerning the allocation of resources depend primarily upon the strength of pressure groups and other vested interests in promoting their sectional interests. The role of research information in this political power game is severely limited. Relatively crude information will generally be adequate as ammunition in the fight to influence political trade-offs. To collect more sophisticated information according to the requirements of rigorous social science may be a waste of time and other resources. It may even be the case that crude information which has a high political or social appeal will be *more effective* in influencing the political process than esoteric data.* Given that the purpose of the development planner is to influence the social and political process — that is, to engage in work with the maximum social product — *effectiveness* is a major consideration in defining methodological rigour.

Moynihan makes related methodological points as a result of his mammoth investigation into educational opportunity in the United States:

> . . . when fairly "crude" measures are refined, the change more often than not turns out to be small. The statistician would wholeheartedly say go ahead and make better measurements, but he would often give a low probability to the prospect that the finer measures would produce information that would lead to a different policy. . . . policy decisions are often rather insensitive to the measures — the same policy is a good one across a greater variety of measures . . . . More data costs money, and one has to decide where the good places are to put the next money acquired for investigations. [1970, p. 972.]

The sociologist concerned with social change will need to acknowledge that in order to influence social change his research will have to be research in action. Research conducted according to the more formal model may be of dubious value. In addition the sociologist who undertakes research in action may find that it is far from easy to attract research funds to finance the high cost of extensive research according to the formal

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* A good example of this is the contrasting effectiveness of the media and academic research in influencing political decisions about resource allocation. Academic papers usually lie undisturbed in learned volumes or journals, even when dealing with vital social issues. If those same issues, using similar arguments and information, are expressed through the news media, however, almost immediate reaction from the political level can be anticipated, possibly leading to purposive action if the campaign is maintained.

model; formally cruder procedures may well be all that is open to him.

It is interesting that, in conducting social planning, research sociologists often seem to be working with a simplistic model of social structure and social change that effectively masks the political nature of policy-making. Social problems are addressed through research with an apparent indifference to the political realities of bringing about change. The trouble is that, as soon as the researcher moves away from simply "illuminating" problems (what Tawney once called creating darkness and calling it research), it is necessary to take into account the political and other structural factors that will militate for and against the solution of that set of problems. As Titmus posits,

> to understand the policy to distinguish between ends (what we want to think we want) and means (how we get there), we have to see it in the context of a particular set of circumstances, a given society and culture, and a more or less specified period of historical time. In other words, social policy cannot be discussed or even conceptualized in a social vacuum. . . . [1974, p. 16.]

Filling the social vacuum with detailed knowledge of structures effective for social change is a task that cannot be undertaken within the formal research model. It involves the investigation of vested interests, lobbies, and processes that are inaccessible to the formal "middle range" researcher; and a more action-oriented investigator operating with cruder techniques (according to the formal model of research) would be more effective.

Therefore, it may be, that there is an inverse relationship between the scale and significance of a social problem or an issue in social change and the degree of methodological rigour in the formal sense that one can bring to the analysis of the problem or issue.

DIALOGUES AND PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The preceding sections of this paper have dealt with certain weaknesses of what has been defined as the formal model of social research. These weaknesses were identified at three levels: the lack of correspondence in the actual practice of social research of the methods

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that researchers employ and the requirements of the formal model; the social consequences of formal methods which reserve the practice of science for socially privileged and powerful groups; and, most significantly for the present discussion, the total inadequacy of formal methods either for investigating significant social and political issues or for creating the conditions for bringing about changes in the circumstances of those issues. Of particular concern in the context of a human-needs approach to social development are the weaknesses of formal methods in investigating the social centre or the social periphery and in creating an active change-oriented relationship between researcher and community in identifying and meeting human needs.

A human-needs approach to social development has been distinguished from other models by its commitment to community mobilization in identifying needs defined as interests and in developing community competence to promote those interests. This undertaking inevitably involves an acceptance of conflict between those interests which are supported by the analysis and opposing interests threatened by these changes; it therefore requires a clear understanding of the characteristics and respective social situations of the powerful and the powerless, together with an acknowledgement of the necessity of purposeful intervention in those situations designed to improve the position of the powerless.

Any method that cannot provide both the theoretical orientation for an active inter-ventionist concept of social science and the tools to carry out the analysis deriving from this orientation is a method inadequate to the requirements of a human-needs approach to social development. More significantly for the task we have set ourselves in a human-needs approach, a method is inadequate if it does not link the process by which needs are identified to the means by which needs may be *met*. It is important to maintain as the central objective of a human-needs approach social and political change to meet needs, not merely the production of improved analytical frameworks for identifying needs.

Unless our methods include the means both to determine *and* to satisfy needs, or to identify *and* promote sectional interests, even the employment of radical methodologies will not provide a way to achieve our political as opposed to our intellectual goals.

Johan Galtung (1978) has provided an excellent description of one radical methodology, the use of dialogues. He defines the dialogue method both negatively, by what it is not, and positively, by what we should attempt to make it. Galtung distinguishes dialogues

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from traditional social science methods for reasons similar to those advanced earlier in this paper concerning the procedural and ideological failings of formal methods of social enquiry, particularly the isomorphism of the methods and social and political structures of domination which characterize both national and international social systems. He goes on to distinguish dialogues from pedagogical or socratic dialogues, as well as from interviews, debates, and parallel monologues.

In the positive definition of dialogues Galtung mentions the following elements: Dialogues are micro-social in orientation (from two persons upward in number); they are horizontal in terms of the interaction of researcher and researched; they imply the mutual conditioning (or learning) of the participants, as well as "togetherness," rather than the objectivity and alienation of survey techniques; they involve the full participation of all the actors involved, and therefore they are integrative, requiring the exercise of the complete range of human attributes rather than segmenting the actors' social situations and personalities for presentation through the research process. The theoretical value of dialogues as a development model is inherent in their methodological features. Dialogues challenge the existing structures by which definitions of reality are arrived at and tested and, given that these definitions and the methods associated with them are rooted in concrete social groups and structures of social relations, explicitly propose an alternative social model isomorphic with the dialogue method.

The central objective of a dialogue method in a human-needs approach to development is to make the people who are the present victims of development better able to achieve improvements in their personal and social situations. It has been argued that this can be achieved only by assisting these people in defining their needs, in understanding the relationship of those needs to the social context in which they are located, and in acting politically to meet those needs.

The possibility of attaining this political goal has to be the main positive feature of a dialogue approach. While it is a matter of emphasis rather than disagreement concerning the role of the dialogues in development, it is probably not the case that, as Galtung suggests, neither pure beta methodologies nor pure alpha methodologies should be given 100 per cent dominance over the research scene. Or at least, while this may be the case in the research scene, it is not the case in the development scene. Those groups we wish to promote in a human-needs approach have little chance of operating alpha methods successfully. Nor will alpha methods with their attendant assumptions about social

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structure and social change bring the needy closer to meeting their needs. For social scientists to use alpha (or formal) social science methods in a human-needs approach to development is to ensure development will not occur. These methods simply produce data for academic conferences and weighty volumes from international agencies. Similarly, to remove beta methods, including dialogues, from a context of development through struggle is still to use these methods for alpha purposes.

Ideally every social scientist should be involved simultaneously with practical action with the needy, and with the theoretical sophistication of methods and needs. That is the ideal situation which links the two vital processes of a human-needs approach to development: first, the process of defining the goals, processes, and indicators of development (and this whole programme is a process, not merely the middle term); and, second, the process of achieving these once they are defined. The relationship of the two is that the process of defining is also part of the process of achieving, if these processes are based in the real-world relationships of individuals and groups.

In the real world, of course, social scientists wear many different hats. Not all link the intellectual and the practical aspects of change, which is why even radical intellectual models can become part of various fashionable academic games played at high economic and social cost. Even for the unmobilized intellectual (as opposed to the uncommitted), however, the contribution made to actually bringing about change, rather than simply developing the concept of it, can be markedly improved if the concept is located in a working model of social change which can serve as both a guide and a legitimation for field agents of change. If the world is to meet human needs in one generation, it will only be achieved by the needy defining their own situation and mobilizing to improve it. The role of the intellectual in this is as a clerk and helpmate to the needy in their struggle to survive and develop. This is a relationship which benefits all parties: It creates the possibility that change may actually (and finally) occur to the benefit of the needy, and it improves the understanding of the intellectual of the nature of needs, the reasons why they have not been met, and the techniques for meeting them. This is not an argument for a closed mind about the variety of the methods, therefore, but for a purposeful application of intellectual energy in which increasing the political capacity of the needy becomes not just a *characteristic* of the dialogue method but its central *objective* in a human-needs approach to development.

In one direction, therefore, the methodological debate in sociology is nothing new: it is

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the continuation of the phenomonological versus the positivist school (although the former now has a new and misleading name in ethnomethodology), or the qualitative versus quantitative controversy, or the verstehen versus social-structural issue, and so on.

In a more profound way, however, the review of the sociological method is new. It consists of a growing realization that all action is political action, in that it either contributes to preserving existing structures of power and advantage (together with disadvantage), even if this contribution is through inaction, or it changes them, again either positively through deliberate choice or negatively through simply ignoring the issue. If action is by its nature political and is likely to influence the life chances of individuals or groups in social systems, then social science should take this fact into account in its work. This concern with the social and political consequences of social science leads inevitably to a desire to use social science actively rather than passively in its world-changing aspect: the effort to change the world is then, of course, carried out in accordance with some conception of what a good world should be.

What has happened to sociological method in its most progressive form is that it has become a process not merely of reflecting a supposedly objective reality but of accepting an involvement in that reality in forging a new and hopefully better world. It is in this way that method in sociology has become participatory, for as Galtung has said, "I dare say that there are very few social findings that would hold up against a different consciousness distribution — in other words very few that are objective in the sense of being automatic" (1977, p. 94). Given the non-automatic nature of social science findings, participatory research attempts to alter the consciousness distribution in favour of individuals or groups suffering disadvantages in order to assist them to increase their competence to mobilize and overcome that disadvantage.

As Galtung again suggests, "It rather shows, I think, that social science has to be steered consciously towards goals of liberation; and this is essentially a political fight" (ibid., p. 95). Social science therefore has to become an invariance-breaking activity through its political involvement with the people who are its subject matter.

Participatory research is an active methodology of personal and community change. It has the following minimum characteristics:

1. It is clearly political and change-oriented in its methodology.

2. It is problem- or project-oriented and is not primarily concerned with the testing of academic theories. For this reason it is multi-disciplinary and searching rather than discipline-bound. It is in this respect that participatory research is most suitable for adult learning linked to community development; as has often been pointed out, adults are always *problem*-oriented, not subject-oriented, in their approach to learning, and learn most effectively when they can see that it is their responsibility as well as that of the formal educator to comprehend and to apply the matter of their learning. (See McLagen [1978] on this issue.)

3. The ultimate goal of participatory research is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement in the lives of the people involved in the research process. The beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community itself. The object of the research is the same as that of education should be — namely, the liberation of human creative potential and the mobilization of human resources for the solution of social problems and meeting human needs.

   Green makes explicit this relationship between method, adult learning, and social change:

   > The first task of education is to create both an understanding that change is possible and the knowledge of alternatives leading to a desire for change. The second is to enable individuals and communities to identify what types of change they wish to achieve and how to set out to attain them. The third — not the first — is the training in particular skills and the provision of particular pieces of knowledge. [1977, p. 21.]

4. Participatory research involves the full active participation of the community in the entire research process. This includes all the stages from the formulation of the problem or project through to the discussion of how to find the solution and the interpretation of any of the products of the research.

5. It involves a whole range of powerless groups of people — the exploited, the poor, the oppressed, the marginal. The research is concerned with change, and the research enterprise must contain all those in a situation who are intended to benefit from change and who are involved in this aspect of the process.

6. The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and their capability to mobilize for self-reliant development. The

research process is therefore a part of a total education and liberating experience which defines community needs and increases awareness and commitment within the community.

7. Participatory research provides a clear understanding for both the researcher and community of community issues and problems, together with a knowledge of the social reality of the people. It is not assumed in advance that the academic has a special insight into the community; rather problems or projects originate in the community itself and are defined, analyzed, and solved by the community.

8. The researcher in this process is a committed participant and learner, a militant not a detached observer, because the process is a dialogue over time and not a static picture from one part of time.

Participatory research therefore brings together research, pedagogy, and mobilization. It is not simply a cheap way of doing social research; neither is it a version of classical anthropological method based on informants and the use of direct verbal material to explore radically different cultures.

Despite an otherwise useful discussion on participatory research, Cain, in a working paper for the International Council of Adult Education's Participatory Research Project, reduces participatory research to just another "soft" social science method when she writes:

> Neither research nor participation can produce change without appropriate
> action in an environment supportive of that action; humans liberate themselves
> in time and space appropriate to themselves. . . . I find it more useful to look
> at participatory research as a process towards gathering new knowledge with
> people defining that knowledge. [No date, pp. 12-13.]

Robbed of its component of social change, participatory research even employing dialogues, which is a method consistent with Cain's approach, becomes little more than a radical anthropological data-collection technique, an apparently beta method used for alpha purposes.

If an external researcher has any role to play in a basic human-needs approach to development, it is through participatory research dialogues with those groups whose interests he wishes to espouse and promote. Dialogues are thus not substitute survey

techniques for discovering community preferences, wants, or needs in a democratic fashion, nor are they just humanistic discussions between equals which happen to be conducted in fieldwork situations. Dialogues are the basis of political action whereby, through a dialectical interaction of expert and community, interest groups learn how to identify and promote their interests in contexts of conflict.

Needs as interests are located in processes of change through participatory research dialogues in situations of *struggle*. The dialogue is the action context within which political organization is born.

Because participatory research employing dialogues is inspired by the impetus to liberation and is a growth-oriented process, it makes heavy personal and intellectual demands on the researcher. Cain suggests that

> of eminent importance is the ability of the researcher to understand what the participants define as reality, to hear what the participants articulate. . . . To rend the veil requires time and . . . "great sensitivity and self awareness on the part of the investigator. The field worker is his own principle research instrument. . . ." [Ibid., p. 19.]

Unlike academic research, which taxes only the intellectual resources of a researcher, participatory research tests aspects of the researcher's ontological status as a human being. It requires not only a sensitivity and concern for others but a fundamental ability to relativize and humanize, linked to a sociological imagination which can picture the researcher's world as problematic rather than unquestionably given, in an epistemological sense. It also requires a conception of social relationships in which the notion of power, domination, exploitation, and the possibility of liberation from all three by the self-actualization of social groups is a basic theoretical paradigm.

When joined to the concept of the dialogue, participatory research carries not merely a methodological significance but a strong moral and ethical redemptive weight as well. It becomes linked to conceptions not merely of social welfare and the improvement of the lot of the needy but of the material and spiritual transformation of individuals and society.

Berger has shown in other contexts that development thinking has always been characterized by powerful religious or mythic overtones of this sort. He has contrasted two orientations of development in terms of their mythic content. The myth of

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modernization, which characterizes economic-growth models, is based upon western concepts of progress through technocratic control and productivity. In this mythological context the concept of economic growth carries a heavy freight of redemptive hope. As the power of modern technological production grows, so does hope for a new world of human fulfilment. It is for this reason that "whoever speaks of economic growth in the third world today is not just engaging in economics, but it is rousing a whole array of redemptive aspirations, the ultimate content of which is mythic" (1977, p. 35).

Berger contrasts to this the myth of revolution. This concerns not gradualist development but the radical transformation of social structures. This transformation is designed to create the conditions for the satisfaction of both man's basic material needs and his spiritual needs for a community of persons and purpose: "The central mythic motif in these quests is the hope for a *redemptive community* in which each individual will once more be 'at home' with others and himself" (ibid., p. 39). It is assumed, however, that the redemptive community will also "deliver the cargo more surely or more swiftly than the gradualists' development models" (ibid., p. 37).

Gunnar Myrdal (1977) has also indicated that for low-income countries ideals of modernization are so much part of the official creed of modernizing elites that they have become almost a national religion, and are certainly powerful strands of third world nationalism.

The mythic content of participatory research for development to meet human needs is demonstrated by frequent references in the literature on this subject to Martin Buber's use of the concept of dialogue.

Herberg has written that in Buber's theory of relationships described in his essay *I and Thou*

> The "primary word" I-Thou points to a relationship of person to person, of subject to subject, a relationship of reciprocity involving "meeting" or "encounter" while the "primary word" I-It points to a relationship of person to thing, of subject to object, involving some form of utilization, domination or control, even if it is so called "objective" knowing. The I-Thou relationship, which Buber usually designates as relationships par excellence, is one in which a man can enter only with the whole of his being, as a genuine person. It is a relationship, incidentally, that Buber feels is possible for men to have not only with human beings, but also with nature and "intelligible forms" (art), thus recalling William James' comment that the "religious" man sees the universe as a "Thou." [1965, p. 14.]

Buber himself writes in *I and Thou*, ". . . when Thou is spoken, the speaker has no *thing*; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation" (1965, p. 44). And then later, with dramatic insight for social science methodology, "This is part of the basic truth of the human world, that only It can be arranged in order. Only when things, from being our Thou, become our It, can they be coordinated. The Thou knows no system of coordination" (ibid., p. 52).

The redemptive aspect of participatory research employing dialogues is clearly that the process is intended to embark both the researcher and the community into a dialectical progression towards new personal and social relationships, for, as Buber again writes, ". . . only men who are capable of saying Thou to one another can truly say We with one another" (ibid., p. 45).

The claim that the fieldworker is his (or her) own principal research instrument does not only imply therefore that research understandings are not mediated through and verified by the usual tools of social research; it also signifies that the researcher has to refine and develop himself as a part of the participatory research process just as a conventional researcher would rework a questionnaire or other research instrument until satisfied that it meets the methodological requirements of an investigation. Participatory research, unless conducted exclusively by mystics and saints, has to be a process of self-discovery for the researcher, as well as an unfolding of the present social reality which is the subject of the research and the dynamic construction of future realities through that process of research.

CONCLUSION

Following the failure of earlier economic models of development, the goal of social and economic development is now to meet basic human needs within one generation, wherever they are currently neglected. It was suggested in an earlier paper (Healey 1978) that, in order for needs to be met, a restructuring of social structures and opportunities will be required in lower income countries; this restructuring will occur only if those in need are able to organize politically to bring about changes in social structures. In defining their

needs and mobilizing to meet them, groups will encounter opposition from those whose position is threatened by these changes. Needs are therefore revealed as interests, those aspects of the social situation of individuals and groups which they will fight hard to promote or defend and which are expressions of their positions in hierarchical social opportunity systems.

For the social scientists concerned to bring about changes to meet human needs, the requirement is to ally themselves with those groups whose interests they wish to promote.

Conventional social science methodology is inadequate to provide change-oriented processes for assisting communities to define and mobilize around their interests. A new conception of science is called for that is not confined within narrow positivist guidelines, even though it can be shown that the shortcomings of existing social science even in terms of the formal model of methodology give reason to believe that it has more of an ideological base than is ever admitted in scientific writing.

Participatory research linked to the concept of the dialogue may provide not just a methodology but a *role* for the social scientist in a human-needs approach to development. This role encompasses both the dialectical relationship of the social scientist to the communities whose interests he espouses and the necessity for the personal development of the social scientist himself.

For human needs to be met requires the mobilization of communities; for the social scientist to have an active role in this mobilization requires a commitment to demanding characteristics of self-development in interaction with those communities. At both the level of social structure and the level of personality, therefore, a human-needs approach provides a programme, and a challenge. The answer to both can be found only in a commitment to processes whose implementation is problematic and whose outcome is entirely uncertain.

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