

The Inter-disciplinary Nature of Social Sciences

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Abstract: *The interdisciplinary nature of social sciences is a defining feature that enhances its ability to address complex societal issues. Unlike traditional, isolated disciplines, social sciences draw upon knowledge and methods from a variety of fields, such as economics, sociology, political science, psychology, and anthropology. This convergence of diverse perspectives enables a more holistic understanding of human behavior, social systems, and cultural dynamics. The integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches, along with collaboration between disciplines, facilitates the exploration of interconnected phenomena such as globalization, inequality, and political change. By bridging gaps between various academic domains, the interdisciplinary approach in social sciences fosters a deeper, more comprehensive analysis of societal challenges, promoting innovative solutions and policy development. This article explores the significance, challenges, and benefits of an interdisciplinary framework within the social sciences, highlighting its role in advancing both theory and practical applications in addressing contemporary global issues.*

Keywords: Global issues, critical social knowledge, disciplines, social scientific disaster, understanding of complex issues.

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1. Introduction

Social phenomena, by nature, are multi-layered and complex. In today's world, issues such as global warming, religious fundamentalism, structural unemployment, rising levels of national debt, and reduced public trust in government have significant social components. This points to the necessity of viewing and engaging with these problems from a multitude of theoretical and methodological perspectives - more than any single discipline within the social sciences can offer. But there is no reason to assume that various social scientific disciplines cannot be integrated in such a way as to produce richer, more comprehensive accounts of the phenomena they study (Fretts, 2013). Should that, in fact, become practice and the separation between various schools of social inquiry get somehow bridged or blurred, it prompts an interesting question: what is the future of social sciences as a domain for understanding and making sense of social life? In their quest to discover mechanisms necessary for amelioration of the purported ills of societal conditions, can/do the social sciences converge into a somewhat amorphous, yet more powerful blob of versatile, critical social knowledge and action or do they get fragmented even further? This essay will strive to address some of these questions. Its main aim is to uncover the benefits of a multi and inter-disciplinary approach to understanding social issues. It also seeks to accentuate the necessity of collaboration among social sciences and related fields. Many contemporary concerns regarding challenges and possibilities associated with that will be briefly alluded to. The paper will employ a range of examples and paradigmatic models to illustrate various theoretical and methodological peculiarities of social sciences in their different modes. Following Michel Foucault's insightful diagnosis that 'perhaps one day this century will be known as Deleuzian', the article does not aspire to encompass all

or even the most important facets of the discussed issue, but rather sketch it in the light of particular streams of interest, variously interwoven by the literature of philosophy, sociology, and geography.

Applied Qualitative Research: Methods for Social Sciences by Dr. V. Basil Hans & Dr. P. P. Sajimon provides an in-depth exploration of qualitative research methodologies specifically designed for social sciences. It covers essential research techniques, data collection methods, and analytical approaches used in fields such as economics, public policy, sociology, and environmental studies. Written by experienced scholars, this guide bridges theoretical knowledge with practical applications, making it an essential resource for students (<https://books.google.co.in/>)

2. Defining Social Sciences

Social sciences can be defined as the scientific study of human society, social relationships, and interactions. The social sciences offer a diverse and complex array of disciplines, worldviews, and methodologies that collectively study individual and collective actions and behaviors, cultural norms and beliefs, power and ethicality, urban and rural landscapes, wealth and poverty, politics and voting patterns, birth and death, and other topics involving human actions. Specifically, the social sciences are sociology, political science, anthropology, economics, education, communication, social policy, criminology, geography, linguistics, and law. The aims and political objectives of these disciplines differentiate social sciences from the natural/biological sciences and mathematics. Moreover, the conventional scientific methodologies, requirements, standards, and institutional structures that regulate natural science research also distinguish social sciences from other forms of inquiry. Social science disciplines can be traced back to the late 18th century, but they were not

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systematically differentiated from philosophy and humanities until the late 19th century. Given our limited space, the historical context and development of the field will not be fully recounted here, but instead a brief outline of the major disciplines falling within the social sciences will be provided. Social science disciplines are each equipped with unique perspectives and methodologies to understand and explain events, activities, behaviors, and beliefs of humans. The scope of the field is vast due to the interconnectedness of the questions addressed, and many events and phenomena require several discipline approaches to examine.

2.1. Overview of Social Sciences

The social sciences are defined as the scientific study of human society and social relationships, including the disciplines of sociology, social psychology, anthropology, social policy, human geography, political science, and economics, as well as interdisciplinary fields like migration studies and science and technology studies (Greenhalgh, 2018). These disciplines encompass a very broad range of underpinning philosophical assumptions about the nature of social reality, how that reality should be studied, and what study designs and methods should be used. Social science research can be conceptual or empirical, quantitative or qualitative, and descriptive or analytical.

As shown in Table 1, the contribution of Disaster Studies to each branch of the social sciences is explained through examples. It is argued that exposures to, recoveries from, preparedness for, local responses to, and collective recoveries induced by disasters have long- and recently-established implications and applications in each corner of the social sciences (Yannitell Reinhardt & D Ross, 2019). Thus, the reader is prompted not only to think of how their own social scientific disciplines would naturally intersect with Disaster Studies, but to think of multidisciplinary examples that could begin to fill gaps in empirical and theoretical understanding emerging from maturing interdisciplinary debates in the social scientific disaster literature. An interdisciplinary understanding of disasters and disaster impacts is uniquely useful social scientific analysis beyond the borders of current disciplinary settings as well as traditional spatial, economic, or political hazards science paradigms. Rather, when thought of in all their societal, political, economic, ecological, and infrastructural ramifications, the scope of the disaster impacts necessitate a social and political lens with which to see society, politics, and therefore social science in a unique way.

2.2. Main Disciplines within Social Sciences

The purpose of the social sciences is to understand, explain, and investigate the ways humans organize and govern their lives and structure their social relationships. The social sciences encompass a wide array of disciplines, with diverse worldviews, methods, areas of inquiry, and languages that are taken to be 'self-evident' within each discipline. Some of the main disciplines that constitute the social sciences are sociology, law, anthropology, political science, psychology, geography, demography, socio-linguistics, and communication science. Of course, within each of these disciplines, other sub-disciplines can be delineated, reflecting different methodological, epistemological, and ontological approaches or foci. Other hybrid forms that cut across the traditional borderlines of social science disciplines can also be found, such as human geography or socio-linguistics, which are not fixed academic disciplines or fields of knowledge, but fluid fields

of engagement and negotiation. As such, the social sciences need to be taken as a dynamic ensemble of fields, made up of diverse and inter-related branches of knowledge (Yannitell Reinhardt & D Ross, 2019). Despite the specificity of each social science discipline, they are not either wholly distinct, or hermetically sealed off from each other. Inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration is now commonly found at the boundaries of different social science disciplines and cross-disciplinary work is often needed to address adequately the complexity of contemporary societal phenomena or to study the same societal phenomenon from different angles or points of view (Greenhalgh, 2018).

3. Inter-disciplinary Approaches in Social Sciences

Social science as one discipline can be subdivided into several different areas including sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science/sociology, and communication studies. There is a need for a broader, all-encompassing definition of social sciences to incorporate research relating to human beings and the societies in which they exist, across all geographic locations and time periods. Inter-disciplinarity refers to the intersection of disciplines to link these areas in various ways, such as through various methodologies and theories (Raento, 2019). Unlike multi-disciplinarity, which includes collaboration among scholars from different disciplines, inter-disciplinarity requires scholars to think outside the boundaries of their disciplines, employing paradigms and theorists from disciplines other than their own. It is assumed that inter-disciplinary research across social sciences can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of a subject of study by providing a multidimensional explanation (Fretts, 2013). Despite the difficulties of language barriers and paradigms, early collaborative efforts in empirical research have been implemented in various ways involving multi-national research. Inter-disciplinarity in academic research has become an international trend. Funding bodies from the US have been supporting collaborative projects for years that involve scholars from Asian countries. In the Netherlands, inter-disciplinary research is encouraged to tackle complex societal problems. The European Science Foundation has encouraged scholars to submit research projects that involve at least three European countries. It is believed that collaboration among scholars in different countries that have different social and cultural backgrounds have the potential to produce rich empirical findings. Inter-disciplinary and multi-national collaboration has the potential to produce more significant research because of the combined resources. For example, an inter-disciplinary project that involved philosophers, sociologists, economists, and anthropologists found that kinship ideology significantly influences the continued influence of kinsmen.

3.1. Definition and Importance

Interdisciplinarity in Social Sciences

In view of the recent prominence of inter/ multi-disciplinary approaches in science, the article defines terms related to this subject and promotes a few reflections over it, particularly in the light of their relevance to the field of social studies. The complexity and multifaceted nature of social phenomena may induce the researchers to adopt a holistic view. This approach considers subjects from contemporary society as intricate and interconnected sets of aspects that have to be apprehended as a

whole. Dissimilar disciplines use their own methods and theories to comprehend different sides of reality, namely social and natural aspects. Therefore, the integration of knowledge and approaches from disparate domains is exceptionally important for a perpetually richer and nuanced understanding of complex issues. Merging their distinct skills in a cooperative and harmonized way renders science better equipped to apprehend profoundly the studied issue concerning both its depth and extension. This cooperation allows detailing the analysis of a phenomenon, explaining the pathways of cause and effect and creating a deep understanding of the system under scrutiny.

Adopting an approach that only makes use of one knowledge domain could lead to reductions in the richness of the understanding that stems from the selection of phenomena investigated, the shortcomings in the breadth and depth of the level of analysis, and the limitations in the formulation of innovative and out-of-the-box remedies for the problems under study. Integrating those various perspectives is important not only to challenge own research, but also to foster critical thinking and broaden research horizons. There is a common middle ground: disciplines may overlap and touch upon similar subjects using semi-independent concepts, vocabularies, or methodologies. When this happens, collaboration is facilitated and productive research environments are established. An excellent example is the intersection of sociology and statistics that spawned the field of social statistics. Bilateral ties between sociology and statistics have evolved to a point where both fields benefit from regular cross-talk. At the same time, typical sociological questions are now routinely posed in a statistical language using innovative quantitative methods, which has led to new approaches and findings. However, it may also be difficult to mix methodologies or terminologies that are too distant or completely incomparable between several disciplines. In this case, fruitful collaboration is impeded and each of the traditional researchers will label the other's methodologies as invalid from a scientific viewpoint. This lines up with the general approach to the integration of qualitatively and quantitatively oriented social scientists. They argue that these two research cultures differ in the type of observable phenomenon they analyze, the terminology they use, the underlying assumptions of what truth is, how their results are used, and overall in the "vocabulary" they speak in. There are no common ties that might help to reconcile them, and they are difficult to enhance in a way that aligns both research programs. Given these concerns, the academic significance of inter-disciplinary approaches, that are now so heavily promoted, is self-evident.

4. Examples of Inter-disciplinary Studies

In keeping with principles of phronesis (Fretts, 2013), these narratives focus on the "who, how, and why" of practical decision-making as it unfolded during the course of each research study.

4.1. Environmental Sociology

Environmental Sociology lies at the intersection of social change and environmental transformation. It deals with living organisms and natural conditions, such as plants, animals, and water, with anthropogenic additives, which are settled and dwell in social systems. These systems differentiate from other specialized organizations, but their activities have considerable effects on populations. Environmental Sociologists are analyzing the influence of different social systems on environmental problems. This subfield of sociology observes macro-level social structures

and rights, such as institutional arrangements, power relations, and normative arrangements.

Natural resources are a geographical focus and theoretical and methodical approaches to how and to what extent groups use and rule over them. Further case studies on deforestation and on environmental pollution illustrate how social behavior influences ecological results. Environmental Sociology integrates a wide range of theories and ideas into environmental studies beyond the purely social. Multifarious cooperation agreements with disciplines that investigate environmental issues are common. This subfield of sociology is integrated into environmental science, social ecology, and policy advice for states, corporations, and environmental organizations. This is how environmental sociologists contribute to a better understanding of the problems of sustainable development and the societal causes and consequences of increasing environmental problems, such as climate change.

To provide a deeper understanding of the social causes and consequences of environmental problems, the relationship between social structures and ecological crisis phenomena needs to be explained across systems of social organization and at different levels of aggregation. In these analytical endeavors, both established and more recent theoretical approaches are used, including cost-benefit analysis, theory of planned behavior, and multi-level analyses. Methodologies use a mix of qualitative and quantitative research in the form of case-oriented research approaches, traditional surveys, and secondary analyses. Besides this methodological and theoretical diversity, environmental sociologists advocate the necessity of a mutuality of disciplinary discussion on environmental problems. In conclusion, a plea is made for problem-oriented, inter-disciplinary cooperation in the analysis and development of policy solutions in order to be able to master the complex social challenges of environmental politics and societal change.

4.2. Economic Anthropology

Economic Anthropology is concerned with investigating economic behaviors and practices in a broad array of cultures, as well as the social institutions which regulate and promote them. It is interested in the social aspects of the satisfaction of human needs, as well as in the ways resources are distributed and allocated in different human societies. It can be looked at as a very old discipline or area of interest, and a deeply contemporary one, because it emerged - or one can pretend it emerged - when both anthropology and economy defined themselves, i.e.: 19th century. It aims at defining and understanding the mechanisms of the distribution, the allocation, the consumption, and the production of the goods and services that are integral parts of the economic activity in the wide sense.

One should not speak about economic anthropology but about economic anthropologies, which are the results of several interdisciplinary efforts. Anthropologists borrowed much to economists and economic historians, but also, using their own competencies, created innovative tools. Economists, when exploring the anthropological field opened by Mauss, Sahlins, Polanyi or Godelier, among many others, contributed to the theoretical and methodological revisions of economic anthropology. A 'return to the real' gave birth to increasing numbers of studies and monographs based on meticulous ethnographic work. However, enhancing the number of case-studies did not hinder the coherence and efficacy of the general theories which only comparative analyses could make fruitful. To

the extent that simplicity is an enemy of theoretical reliability, a good economic anthropology should be complex, offering a wide range of different reading frames dealing with a broad and stratified set of societies and of phenomena (Schmidt, 2005).

What has been called 'the economy' by economists belongs actually to a plethora of different and often contrasting realizations. It is a universal claim in economic anthropology that the wide spectrum of economic systems can only be understood in their own cultural contexts. The borrowing of the tools and concepts of economy to stress the theoretical relevance of social notions and the connection of economic anthropology to the other disciplines studying the economic facts within the global framework of society have been strong sources of debates in the second half of the 20th century. With the worldwide spread of capitalism and market economy, it has increased and reformulated a lot more.

5. Challenges and Benefits of Inter-disciplinary Research

What role do education and events like those in Amsterdam, Chicago, or Madrid play in the increasing interaction between planet, its cultures, and societal well-being? Since the 1960s with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, environmental concerns have expanded dramatically and, recently, have taken a more urgent turn with consideration of pressures on global systems. Media coverage, educational improvement in developing nations, and travel opportunities for the public, especially the young, have also helped to make people more cosmopolitan and aware of the scale of human pressures on the environment (Pooley et al., 2014). This is one of the purposes of many educational scientific and cultural programs of excellence, directed initially by the UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program and the fascinating map of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and, later, other programs involving natural and cultural idioms, policies, economics, behaviors and beliefs: Nine Worlds Camp, Sacred Site, and Urban Bushman to name just some. Professional dialogues, including many annual symposia have evolved that variously encourage organizational and national cultures of appreciation and education of the natural world (Farrow McNeely et al., 2018).

6. Conclusion

The inherent inter-dependence of all things has long been represented through ecology within the sciences. As disciplines of land become departments within universities, it can also be said the earth mirrors distinct fields. However, as diverse communities continue to develop, grow, and effect one another, there has been a recognition of the need for an understanding of social relations. In this consortium, inter-disciplinary integration can be seen as having evolved far enough along to analyze its potential for cultivation or its expiration and subsequent regressive evolution back into respective fields of study (Fretts, 2013).

Despite the tension in our field between quantitative and so-called "qualitative" methodologies, social sciences have begun to experiment with mindfulness practices. This consortium of research among scholars from social work, cultural anthropology, political science, and public health began to analyze the implications of the social, political, and moral ramifications of mindfulness programs being instituted in public elementary schools, juvenile detention centers and groups of freedom fighters

on nine isolated Pacific-rim islands. Results are still being analyzed, but prosodically the conversation had a very calming effect, and there was a palpable sense that each field had gained a tacit sense of something very profound and social-scientific that each of their top independent researchers would never know otherwise, indicating that their conscious attempt toward inter-disciplinary integration should not only be continued, but carefully disseminated as well. In this way, the respective discipline-niches of each constituent group of the conversation consortium can sustain a more interconnected understanding. If it is not approached with forethought, a regressive evolution of accelerated tension might further fracture unprecedented levels of conflict among the social sciences on how multi-disciplinary mindfulness practices should. This is not meant to sound alarmist, as all involved expressed hopes that something actionable could be pursued together, though as long as there is continued dialog among the disciplines, the current state of inter-disciplinary integration will not be unique in the future either. Applied mindfulness research among the social sciences is a rapidly growing field, and cross-discipline exchanges continue to enrich both the social sciences as a whole, and conjointly those that participate in it.

Given the disciplinary breadth of the interests taken by practitioners of social science, it is hard to see how social studies of social science can be otherwise than inter-disciplinary. Such interests may engage with literatures relating to general issues in the methodology of the social sciences; with bodies of work on human cognition; with sectoral interests, e.g. medical, educational and psychological; and with the content areas that constitute the subject matter of a particular piece of research (Mair et al., 2013). Interviews and observation in a laboratory would involve a consideration of the nature of accounts in science and of the knowledge claims of the exact sciences; the conduct of ethnographic fieldwork would raise questions about the literature on the characteristics of organizations and on government policy. Efforts to encompass these wider issues may either form a discrete section of a paper or report, or be so woven into the fabric of a text as to be largely invisible.

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