

Preface

The present book is the third in a series, following the predecessors Methodology and Ideology (1977) and Papers on Methodology (1979). Like the other two the point of departure was my work in the 1960 on methodology in the social sciences, published Theory and Methods of Social Research (1967); and like the other two the present book is not an exercise in rejecting earlier positions, but an exercise in showing their limitations, and trying to open for some new possibilities.

More particularly, this book grew out of the confrontation between the methodology of social sciences and the general development problématique, a confrontation that came automatically as a consequence of the author's involvement in a major project on goals, processes and indicators of development. Of course it is possible to go into this problématique in an unreflected manner, with all the technology for data collection and data processing, the methodology for data analysis and theory formation, and the underlying epistemology that has come out the Occident in general, and its North-Western corner around the North Atlantic in particular. This has been done many times and the statement that it yields interesting findings is as true as the statement that there are problems.

In the present book these problems are organized in five chapters. The first chapter is an effort to discuss the assumptions underlying methodology and epistemology, relating them to

the hidden program, the deeper code of civilizations, here referred to as (social) cosmology. The old Occident/Orient divide is made use of, building on some very basic features of Christian versus Buddhist thinking. But then that point is taken further, showing subdivisions in the occidental intellectual world, between saxon, teutonic and gallic styles of inquiry. And it all ends up with a thesis which again has the air of the trivial, but is far from trivial in its consequences: there is no such thing as a universal methodology, because there is no universal epistemology; the epistemology being part and parcel of the cosmology in which it is embedded, and consequently a function of the civilization (or macro-culture) in which it is rooted. That the leading methodology is the methodology of the leading countries is as obvious as the corresponding statement for cosmology in general. But in a development setting this translates into relations of power and dominance, and becomes the intellectual projection of economic, political and generally culture dominance of one civilization or culture over others. Hence, it becomes a serious matter.

Whereas the first chapter deals with the more fundamental levels of the scientific edifice the other four chapters are more located at the points more readily identified with methodology. Applying the distinction used above dialogues can be seen as an alternative approach to data collection; networking as an alternative approach to data processing and data analysis and in general to the whole social science enterprise. Then, in chapter four, there are some reflections on alternative forms of theory formation, and in chapter five alternative forms of presentation of research findings, the final, usually forgotten stage.

There are two threads running through the fabric woven by these four chapters: there is a research job to be done, understanding and reflecting on social reality including communicating the findings; and there is a development project going on, a project that can be defined in many ways but always has something to do with the improvement of the human condition. It is generally agreed, regardless of ideological orientation or deeper commitments, that research on development should also in some way or another be research for development. The research job feeds on the development project, extracting data as raw material to be processed till it ends up as research findings. But, the idea is that these findings should then be fed back to the development project, stimulating it, promoting development; in turn leading to evaluative research jobs, in an endless cycle. In this book that position is accepted, but with an effort to take it at least one step further. The research job itself should be a development project, offering itself examples of human and social development. At the very least the research job should not be an example of anti-development, carried out by structures and carrying values that are anti-thetical to development in any reasonable sense of that term. Research should not stand in the way of development; it should facilitate, being itself an example.

How that is done is reported in the four chapters. However, at this point a very simple definition of development is needed. Instead of long, complex definitions I shall simply make use of this one: development is the increasingly autonomous satisfaction of the basic human needs of those most in need, in harmony with nature.

In saying so four positions have been taken. The core is basic human needs, in other words the human level. Their satisfaction should reduce social inequality , and be increasingly autonomous, in other words the social level. Thus, there is both human and social development in the definition, and the latter both at the national and global levels, reducing inequality and increasing autonomy. And then there is the fourth space of development, a necessary part of any decent development definition: in harmony with nature.

Of course, this is vague. But then it is only a simple definition of the goal of development, not of the processes (in plural) of development. The goals should remain vague, just pointing to some basic aspects, in order not to be restrictive. They should serve as a guide, nothing more. There are many ways of conceiving of human needs and their satisfaction. There are very many ways of working towards the goals of development. And even more ways of working oneself (and others) away from them.

So, for the research job to be a part of the development project, the research itself has to satisfy basic human needs of those touched by it. It has to reduce social inequalities, among researchers, among the researched, between researcher and researched. It has to be done in an autonomous manner, at the local, national and regional levels. Exactly what this may mean, in practise, is what chapters 2,3,4, and 5 are about; with the first chapter as a general exploration of cultural awareness, of the dangers of cultural absolutism. For we still live in more than one world, however much maldevelopment spills over from one to the other.

My gratitude goes to all those with whom I have been working on methodology and development during the last years, many of them at the Institut Universitaire d'Etudes du Developpement in Geneva. And above all to those not scientifically trained with whom I have discussed these matters, with the hope that the book may increase their numbers.

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Johan Galtung