SOCIOLOGY ON THE ROCK
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“As human beings, we are not condemned to be swept along by forces that have the inevitability of laws of nature. But this means that we must be conscious of the alternative futures that are potentially open to us”

Anthony Giddens


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OUR NEW COLLEAGUES

Alan Hall

After almost twenty years as a full-time academic, I want to begin by admitting that this was not at all my career plan. When I decided to do my PhD, I was never intending to become an academic. I had finished my MA in community psychology and was working at a Toronto community mental health centre doing community outreach and program evaluation research for various prevention programs. Most of the programs were focused on low-income families and communities which fit perfectly with my interests at the time. While firmly committed to continuing as an applied researcher in the realm of health and poverty, I thought a doctorate was essential to a full-fledged research career where I could develop and seek research grants and larger projects. Although intending to stick with the mental health field, I decided to shift my discipline to sociology for my PhD because I wanted to develop my understanding of survey and qualitative methods and because I realized that psychology was rather limited when it came to theorizing about the social, political, and economic origins of poverty.

I entered the doctoral program with what I thought was a clear dissertation topic following in the footsteps of the work I had done for my MA, which was the testing of a social psychology model on prevention service barriers. For my PhD, I planned to do a social network analysis of the barriers and links to health service access, again within a low-income community. However, after an incredibly stimulating theory course, lots of reading and increasing involvement in my teaching assistant union, I became less and less interested in social networks and poverty theory and more interested in social class, labour and health. Following what was effectively a full year off to serve as the President of the University of Toronto teaching assistant union, I shifted my thesis topic completely doing an ethnographic study of health and safety in underground mining with a different supervisor and a completely different committee. While I later did some sessional teaching at Concordia University in Montreal, my union and other social activist involvement in Toronto had cemented my continued interest in a non-academic career, and my intention was to follow in the same track as one...

Rose Ricciardelli

I’m a strong believer that for academics writer’s block is a myth or an excuse for procrastination. Indeed, the majority of my writing takes the form of reporting on emergent findings which the data have revealed to my welcoming eyes. (How can I have writer’s block when all that needs to be written is clearly on the screen waiting for interpretation?) In being asked to introduce myself as the newest faculty member in the department of sociology, however, I am experiencing just that! I’ve been left speechless – a rare occasion indeed. Reflecting on how to begin, I recognize that I am happy to be here at Memorial University, excited by the incredible people I have come to know in the department and beyond, impressed by the proactive and progressive justice environment in the province. I feel I have landed in the academic equivalent, for a justice researcher, of a goldmine. Interestingly, despite my more recent work being focused on corrections and moving into policing, this does seem a fair and significant departure from where I started.

After a few terms at La Sapienza (Università di Roma) when I opted to move to Italy, I started my undergraduate training a second time, majoring in sociology. Growing up in Ontario, I was relatively sheltered from the realities of social inequalities in a more immediate sense and after living in Europe – studying languages – and learning about sociology’s classical theorists, which was common knowledge to the persons in my company, I returned to Canada with a newfound interest in the theoretical underpinnings of sociology as a discipline. I did quick undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Western Ontario, clearly anxious to leave London a second time after only being “home” less than four years, and left for McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, to pursue a Ph.D. degree.

The topic I proposed for my Ph.D., lived experiences with HIV/AIDS, changed soon after my arrival at McMaster. But it was during fieldwork at a center frequented primarily by persons and partners of persons with AIDS (no longer the dormant HIV virus) that I became intrigued by how the body impacts the masculine “self” when dealing with issues of physicality tied to the illness.
of my thesis committee members, Jim Turk, who had left academe to work for the United Electrical Workers. Just after getting my doctorate, I obtained a staff officer position with the Ontario Hydro Professional and Administrative Employees Association in Toronto, and worked there for two years doing grievance work, collective bargaining, and research. However, sixty-hour workweeks with a long-distance commuting marriage and a new baby simply did not work out. I applied for and received a SSHRC post-doc which allowed me to spend more time at home. Although I always thought I would go back to work for a union, I began sessional teaching in the second year of my post-doc and then was fortunate enough to get a tenure-track position at the same university as my spouse. Around this point in time, the local CAW union leadership approached me and another faculty member about establishing a labour studies program at the University of Windsor. Before too long, we had the program up and running and I was working as its Director as well as teaching in the program. Although it was always a struggle given the lack of resources, we were able to build the program to a respectable seventy majors with a full load of courses and multiple degree options. Along the way, I discovered the great satisfaction that comes from teaching and scholarly research. Along with courses in my subject area, medical sociology, sociology of work, labour markets, labour law, and organizational theory, I was asked to teach in the criminology program which involved courses is social deviance, corporate crime, and sociology of law. I liked the variety and the opportunity to teach at varying sizes and levels from large 200-level classes to small graduate classes, and really enjoyed the challenges of developing and growing a new program (i.e., labour studies).

My research had developed along somewhat diverse trajectories. While my first post-doc research at McMaster University had been in occupational health focusing on the 1990 reform of the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act, I did a second post-doc study at the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research on sustainable agriculture which looked at the way in which sustainability had been constructed within both government farm and corporate discourses. I argued that those discourses pushed new "sustainable" methods and technologies which not only retained but actually expanded pesticide use.

Given funding to research masculinities and the body, I used my knowledge garnered from this fieldwork to shape a thesis that strove to accomplish three goals, across three papers. First, to determine how masculinities have evolved in terms of presentation and thus what constitutes masculinities in current Canadian society; second, to learn how the body impacts self-identification for men; and third, to reveal how men who have undergone or were proactively seeking cosmetic surgery (i.e., having at least booked an appointment) conceptualize the decision to achieve a masculine subject position. Explicitly, I opted to investigate the evolution of masculinities: the role of culture in concepts of masculinities, and the relationship between understandings of gender-perceived risk and self-identity. The focus was gender, health, deviance, and the body. My research was, and continues to be, very much influenced by the work of R.W. Connell. I must add that I’m super excited to see her speak at the British Criminology Conference in Liverpool this July!

While working on my dissertation, I was also introduced to the topic of wrongful conviction first by coming into contact with the Association in Defense of the Wrongfully Convicted and then fortified by meeting an exoneree – and now friend – who had spent years in prison for a crime he did not commit. The injustice he experienced and continues to experience motivated me to start researching in the area. (For anyone interested, Google Dr. Charles Smith, formerly a forensic pathologist at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto; or the cases of Baltovich, Mullins-Johnson, and the many others across the country including three here in Newfoundland, who have made national headlines.) The end goal was to acquire the knowledge to make a solid case for presenting needed policy changes to the federal government (e.g., public apologies and compensation to exonerees) – clearly a work in progress. I have actively researched attitudes, perceptions, and definitions of wrongful conviction. It was, however, in my correspondence with people who had been exonerated, that I learned about their diverse prison experiences including threats while incarcerated. As a result, I became interested in examining how masculinities are constructed and embodied in prisons.

Having earned my Ph.D., I was offered a position as a contractually limited Assistant Professor at York
I decided to continue on this track of research and subsequently received a three year SSHRC grant to look at what was happening to organic farming as it developed in the Ontario context. A key focus of this study was to identify different streams of organic farming based on both an analysis of farmer practices and discourses. I was especially interested in the extent to which organic farming was being “conventionalized” or “industrialized.” In both these agricultural studies, I also retained my interest in occupational health and safety by looking simultaneously at the health and safety practices of farmers.

Given that I was teaching in the criminology program and director of the labour studies program, I also wanted to come up with some research that would combine these interests. While helping to organize a general strike in Windsor (part of the rotating Ontario strikes of the mid 1990s), I noticed some interesting dynamics between labour and the local police around the negotiation of the protest. I subsequently collaborated with a colleague, Willem de Lint, to obtain a SSHRC grant to do a cross-country study of the policing of labour. It was a big project involving a survey of forty-four police services including the RNC, interviews with labour-related police personnel, labour leaders and labour relations managers, case studies of four police services and archival research, eventually resulting in a book titled *Intelligent Control: Developments in Public Order Policing in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

After finishing the policing project, I decided to move back into occupational health and safety research which led first to a study on injury and hazard reporting funded by the Ontario Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB). A key objective of this study was to examine whether injury and hazard reporting were related to ethnicity, immigrant status, and racialization. Our findings suggested that there were relatively limited reporting differences once we controlled for variations in unionization and employment insecurity. I was then approached by some union health and safety activists in Ontario to join a new research group called LOARC, which involves activists, academic researchers and researchers from the Ontario Occupational Health Clinic Network. Along with conducting teach-ins and webinars for workers and activists, we applied for funding to do a study on worker health and safety University in Toronto, where I was able to pursue funding for research in a potentially new area. Indeed, hearing about prison experiences provided the foundation for my now primary research interests: the intersections of criminal justice—specifically corrections and punishment—and gender. Luckily, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada came through for me and I was able to use funds to look at gender in prison. Yet, after interviewing nearly sixty former prisoners on parole and hearing their stories, I started to write about other areas experienced by former federal prisoners: sex offenders; sexuality; violence; coping; the inmate code; hate crime; routine; healthcare; and the view of correctional officers. The accounts of prisoners further fueled an interest in investigating the experiences of correctional officers. Although I have written about officer orientations, edge-work (the strategic negotiation of high-risk acts), and gender, there is much more writing to emerge from my one hundred interviews with officers. Now their voices, too, must be heard.

Luckily, I am now able to share my excitement about research in criminal justice and gender with MUN students—and anyone hoping to be actively involved in my research—as I continue in my current work. My current focuses, never abandoning work on wrongful conviction of course, can be articulated as three projects, the first drawing from interviews with correctional officers. Second, I am also active in community corrections focusing on offender reintegrating and promoting desistance by being the academic lead in a collaborative project which strives to design a process that promotes and encourages desistance. Select parolees, largely those deemed high-risk for returning to crime (e.g., not desist) can enter a four week, now paid (!!!), training program where they are roasting Klink Coffee ([www.klinkcoffee.com](http://www.klinkcoffee.com)) or active in the coffee industry learning valuable skills (e.g., not simply washing dishes and floors). The money made from Klink coffee sales will be placed back into the program to provide opportunities for more offenders! Currently, I’m interviewing the cohorts through the process to see what works and what does not. Being fair, we do not yet have the “klinks” in the process worked out for the St. Leonard Society’s team at the Toronto Day Reporting Centre, but we are making progress. Thus I do hope this initiative will be a success and make a positive impact in the lives of former
representation. Our first application was denied. The reasons given were that the proposal was too focused on defining worker representation as political rather than a collaborative role. We then modified some of our language and received funding for a study which surveyed a thousand worker representatives along with fifty follow-up interviews. We are now using the study to develop a guide and new training programs which focus very explicitly on the political skills and resources that representatives need to be effective in preventing injuries and disease. It is our plan to use the reporting of the study results and the guide to help develop a province-wide and perhaps nationwide network of worker representatives.

Over the last three years, I’ve also worked on an unfunded project which involved a collaboration with a small number of undergraduate labour studies students who helped to collect and analyze survey and interview data looking at the reporting of employment standards and workplace safety violations by high school and university students working in part-time or summer employment. This project was coupled with a community educational program that the labour studies program established for high school students which involved labour studies university students who went into the schools to talk about worker rights and the factors which lead to violations and the acceptance of violations. The research collaboration was also tied to a research course and a scholarship program which provided some funding for students to do this work. We decided to couple the research with outreach as a way of demonstrating the need for this kind of educational program. When I left Ontario this past summer, we were in the process of lobbying the Ministry of Labour for larger scale funding to expand the program to all the high schools across the province.

The young worker research project also expressed for me an expanding interest in worker rights rather than just health and safety. I am following that interest further through my involvement in a SSHRC Partnership Grant study which is looking at Employment Standards Violations in Ontario. Although it is always a challenge to work with a large group of partners, I am really impressed with the level of involvement by our community partners which include the Parkdale Legal Clinic and three Worker Centres. I am convinced that this project will help to direct some badly needed

John McLevey and Allyson Stokes at a party following their PhD graduation ceremony at McMaster University.
attention to the problem of employment standards abuse.

Where I go from here in terms of my specific subject matter is a little uncertain at this point but my priority is to develop projects in Newfoundland and Labrador. I am exploring an ethnographic study of health and safety committees in the health, construction, oil and mining industries, and given that I am back teaching criminology and policing courses, I am also thinking about a study on stress and risk within the police.

One thing is certain. I don’t want to do research where I can’t see some direct channels leading to some kind of useful impact. My last three projects have allowed me to meld my applied and academic interests in ways that I have found quite satisfying; I finally feel that I am doing research which is being more immediately and directly used to try to affect some kind of changes in conditions or practices which impact on workers. To be honest, up until this point, my efforts to translate research into action had been rather limited and certainly not very successful. I had become what I always disliked about many academics. The focus was on the scholarly publication and not on whether it had any impact or relevance to anyone else. I tried to make up for this by being active outside the research domain. I held every executive position in my local faculty union outside of president, and served provincially for several years on the Board and Executive of the Ontario Confederation of Faculty Associations (OCUFA). I served on virtually every faculty association committee from grievance, negotiations, occupational health and safety, to political action and I’ve done several membership surveys as well. I was also active in the local Labour Council and a number of other community organizations such as the Windsor Occupational Health Information Service and the Third World Resource Centre, and I was the co-founder and chair of the Board of the Windsor Workers’ Action Centre which assists and advocates on behalf of non-union and vulnerable workers. In truth, I enjoyed this community work and felt that it provided me with a wealth of insight and experience to use in my research and my teaching, but the one thing that continued to bother me until recently at least was my failure to connect my research to the community more effectively.
The last several projects have eased that disconnect for me and I hope I can continue to do the same in my future research. While I would not recommend this kind of trajectory for current students, especially the activist and community work since it is not the best way to develop a successful academic career, it has worked out for me in the end. I’ve enjoyed all the variety and the challenges that go with administration, teaching, research and activism, and look forward to pursuing the same here in sociology at Memorial. It should not be hard given all the great staff, faculty and students we have.

**Zombie Economics, Sociology, and North America’s Celtic Tiger**

By James Overton

**Introduction**

The activities of academics are rarely discussed in public. But such occasions do sometimes occur. One such period of academic self-examination and public scrutiny was the second half of the 1960s when, as Mark Solovey tells us, “relations between the national-security state and academia became embedded in divisive arguments about the nature of American society and its role on the world stage.” The catalyst for this debate about the use and abuse of social science by the state – what he termed “the politics-patronage-social science nexus” – was the revelation that Project Camelot, a six-million dollar, military-sponsored study of the revolutionary process, had been initiated by the government of the United States (“Project Camelot and the 1960s Epistemologic Revolution: Rethinking the Politics-Patronage-Social Science Nexus,” *Social Studies of Science*, 31, 2001: 183).

In the wake of the financial crisis which emerged in 2007-08, and which is still wreaking havoc in many parts of the world, there has emerged a wave of criticism of some academic disciplines – economics in particular and to a lesser extent sociology. This criticism has come from academics themselves, but in Britain it has also emanated from the *Guardian* newspaper and especially from the pen of Aditya Chakrabortty, that newspaper’s lead writer on economics and a former senior producer of economics news at the British Broadcasting Corporation.

**Crisis in Economics?**

Economists first came in for criticism for their failure to predict the credit crunch and the ensuing financial and economic crisis. Although prophets had seen the crisis coming, most mainstream economists dismissed their arguments. Criticism of mainstream economics swiftly moved on from its failure to predict the crisis to claims that it had played a key role in the creation of the crisis. Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the US General Reserve, acknowledged that he had “discovered a flaw in the model of liberalization and self-regulation.” Such statements encouraged some people to imagine that a serious rethinking of both mainstream economics and public policy might be imminent. This optimism, however, proved unwarranted.

Writing in late 2008, economist Geoffrey Hodgson argued that the financial crisis required a reform of the discipline of economics similar to the one which followed the crisis of 1929. However, he warned that “neither crashes, crises nor failures of prediction necessarily impel economists in the direction of realism.” In order for economics to be
revitalized it would be necessary to embrace “unfashionable” discourses such as economic history and the history of economic thought, in order to understand how economics took a wrong turn and to examine closely the “relationship between economics and ideology.” Moreover, he urged that “a world protest of academic, student and business economists be organized to drive home this point” so that economics might prove “its relevance for the understanding of the most severe crisis of the capitalist system since the 1930s” (“After 1929 Economics Changed: Will Economists wake up in 2009?,” Real-world Economics Review, 48, 2008: 273-278).

It is clear that rather than precipitating a far-reaching examination of mainstream economic thinking and the government policies which it supposedly informs, the crisis has seen the grip of economic orthodoxy tightened. Rather than a revolution in economic thinking, mainstream free-market thinking continues to dominate the ideas arena. Writing in the New York Times in December 2010, Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman made this comment:

> When historians look back at 2008-10, what will puzzle them most, I believe, is the strange triumph of failed ideas. Free-market fundamentalists have been wrong about everything – yet they now dominate the political scene more thoroughly than ever (Paul Krugman, “When Zombies Win,” New York Times, 19 December 2010: A29).

Krugman also pointed out that George Osborne, who was then Britain’s Chancellor of the Exchequer in the coalition government led by Conservative David Cameron, had embraced the Irish economic model as “a shining example of the art of the possible in long-term economic policy making” as late as 2006. Then, when the crisis struck, Osborne called on governments to emulate Ireland’s austerity policy without admitting that he had been wrong about the Irish model. Ireland had been celebrated for well over a decade as an economic success story which should be emulated elsewhere.

Since the 1990s, there has been considerable interest in using the Irish model of development to address Newfoundland’s economic problems.

The strange triumph of failed ideas is a theme which has been taken up more recently by others, who have examined in detail the crisis in various European countries. In the introduction to a collection of essays published in 2012, Steffen Lehndorf contended that “core elements of elite opinion have maintained a dominant course throughout the crisis, albeit cautiously at the beginning” while noting the “stubbornness of those in power amidst chaos and disorientation” (Steffen Lehndorf, Ed. The Triumph of Failed Ideas – European Models of Capitalism and the Crisis. Brussels: European Trade Union Institute, 2012: 8). Colin Crouch has also made “the strange non-death of neo-liberalism” a theme of a book (Polity Press 2011).

There is a mounting body of criticism of zombie economics from a range of perspectives within and without the discipline, as well as by media and political commentators. Criticism of the failures of economics is being extended to include the policies which governments have introduced in response to the crisis – especially the far-reaching austerity programs which have been so widely introduced. Also, in Britain, there is now a movement among university students which is pressing for reform of economics, including the introduction of a wider range of perspectives within the curriculum. In spite of all this, in mainstream economics and in government circles business as usual is the norm.

There is a considerable body of work by academics, documenting the impact of the crisis in various countries. The theme of failed ideas has been explored in essays edited by Lehndorf (2012) which deal with various European countries, including France, Greece, Spain, Britain, and Ireland. James Wickham’s chapter about Ireland confirms the views of Krugman:

> ...the crisis in Ireland is the crisis of a success story. Logically, one would expect that the depth of the crisis would lead to a questioning of the model, but that has not happened. The Irish crisis shows how a
whole political system can go into denial (James Wickham, “After the Party’s Over – The Irish Employment Model and the Paradoxes of Non-learning,” in Lehndorf: 50).

Sociology in Question

Aditya Chakrabortty has criticized sociologists’ alleged failure to examine both the social processes by which the failed economic model came to dominate academic thinking and government policy ("Economics is in Crisis: But why aren’t Political Scientists and Sociologists Offering an Alternative View,” Guardian, G2, 17 April 2012: 5). But criticism has also been focused on the discipline’s failure to adequately analyze state responses to the crisis and to document the negative impacts of the crisis and government austerity policies. Representatives of the British Sociological Association (BSA) have responded, notably John Brewer, who in June 2012 replied to Chakrabortty on behalf of the Association. Brewer noted that he had already provided the journalist with a “list of sociologists who have published books, or written articles, around the origins of the crisis and its consequences” (John Brewer, “Yes, Sociologists do Play a Key Role in Interpreting the Global Financial Crisis,” Guardian, 6 June 2012: 32).

For some time the BSA has sought to encourage debate about sociology and public policy. In response to the coalition government’s budget cuts announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review, it created the blog Sociology & the Cuts which first appeared in late 2010 where sociologists have commented on a range of public issues, including the riots of 2011 and the impact of funding cuts on academic research. In 2013, Sociology, the journal of the British Sociological Association, was perhaps reacting to the challenge posed by Chakrabortty when a call was made for submissions to a special issue titled Sociology and the Global Economic Crisis to be published in 2014. The call for papers posed this question:

Has the crisis highlighted important limits to our sociological imagination linked to either the subdivision of our discipline or, more fundamentally questioned the contemporary relevance of sociology as a social science?

From the blurb which accompanies the call for papers, it is clear that some attention is being given to the continued relevance of sociology as a social science, while there is a request to address the question of how sociologists can contribute to an understanding of the lived experience of the global economic crisis.

Public Sociology and the Impact of the Economic Crisis

The call for sociologists to focus on crisis-related research comes at a time when there is increasing discussion of what Michael Burawoy in North America calls “public sociology” and Brian Turner in Great Britain sees as the lack of involvement by sociologists in public intellectual life. There is also growing interest in examining what Mark Solovey called the politics-patronage-social science nexus. Here, much of the work has been highly critical of the way sociology has been – and is being – used by the state, for example, in counterinsurgency activities. Such concerns already had a long history by the time Ralph Beales wrote Politics of Social Research: An Inquiry into the Ethics and Responsibilities of Social Scientists (Aldine 1969).

Criticism by economists, sociologists, and other academics of their role in the crisis also comes at a time when cuts in state support for post-secondary education and higher student fees increase pressure on academic researchers seeking outside funding for their investigations. More generally, pressure is on post-secondary educational institutions to prove that they are useful by tailoring research and teaching more directly to meeting the needs of something loosely called “the community.” Concern with the public impact of research in the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences is to be found in universities in North America and Europe. Memorial University is no exception to this. What is happening elsewhere certainly has lessons for Newfoundland academics.

Louise Tickle (“New Funding Policy Threatens Research,” Guardian Education Supplement, 13 November 2012: 2) examines the move by the
British government to grade universities on their social impact. Every institution of higher education in the UK is being required to “prove its ‘impact’ on public life” as part of its effort to obtain research funding from the state. For the first time the social influence of a university department’s research will count for a fifth of its score when these institutions are assessed for the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The Framework replaces the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a process for determining the size of the research grant each university receives. The new system places more emphasis on assessing social influence than was formerly the case.

There has been substantial criticism of the system. Philip Moriarty, professor of physics at Nottingham University, argues that impact is often less about what is good for the public and more about what is good for industrial companies. The impact criteria push research towards short-term, market-oriented research. This is causing the culture of research in universities to change as academics become “almost embarrassed to do fundamental science that you cannot write an impact statement about” (quoted in Swain 2013). Ben Martin, professor of science and technology policy studies at the University of Sussex, suggests that the process of “getting to grips with something as slippery as impact is flawed” and that the “whole thing is an exercise in writing convincing fairy stories” (ibid.).

So central has the issue of the societal influence of academic research become that there is emerging what is now being called an impacts industry (Harriet Swain, “The ‘impacts’ industry is born,” Guardian, 12 November 2013: 38). This is an industry of writers and consultants who are “dedicated to helping academics and universities with the story telling process.” Exeter University has appointed an impact manager, and private companies and consultants are providing educational institutions and academics with support in both improving the narrative style of impact statements as well as providing the kind of evidence which will meet the criteria of the REF guidelines.

One consultant argues that good networking is essential in order to develop a “convincing” impact story. Academics are advised to “build a strong personal profile” through the use of social media – blogging and being LinkedIn – so that they can “present themselves as public figures, not just professors” (Swain 2013). The talk is about the self “branding” of academics so that they become better known and better connected. The trend also seems to be pushing academics to try and sell their work and to demonstrate its importance by, for example, going on the radio or television.

The basic idea here is that “good” research (determined by some measure of its impact) will be encouraged by rewarding chosen individuals or institutions with further funding. The new measures have generated considerable critical comment from a wide range of academic disciplines. Much of the concern focuses on the problem of how to demonstrate and measure impact. Some have argued that “the value of research is not always something that you can predict from the outset;” others claim that “if you’re in the business of producing ideas and culture as you do in arts and humanities research, then you’re not producing tangible, measurable effects – what we do has non-tangible effects that are no less important.” These objections are sensible. There are also concerns that the new framework will create bias against research lacking easily demonstrated potential impacts. Inevitably the move is focusing attention on social effects and on how benefits are identified and measured. Are economic benefits to be prioritized? What about research which may have little obvious economic benefit but a hugely important influence in other ways?

Impact assessment and cost-benefit analysis have long been used and much debated by researchers in the social sciences. But most of the basic lessons of this debate seem to be ignored in current efforts to demonstrate and measure influence. One remarkable feature in the discussions of social impact is the refusal to consider that research may have negative effects. The assumption seems to be that any effect is positive and worthwhile. But how are situations to be dealt with where poor research
is produced or where misleading or false claims are made which have negative social consequences? How are we to deal with the problem of “failed” ideas? And surely the recent debates about the role of academics in relation to the present crisis are of relevance in revealing some of the real problems of assessing and measuring consequences.

For economists and sociologists, one of the lessons of current debates about the crisis is that impact cannot be measured in any sensible and consistent way. There is much talk about the wholesale failure of economics to predict the crisis, and even criticism of the way in which that discipline’s erroneous view of the world fed into or helped create the crisis. But how would this situation be handled according to the current British research impact assessment procedures?

In the Service of Neo-liberalism?

Whether sensible and logical, or not, policies like those outlined above have a major influence on sociological research. However, in Britain there is also pressure from the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government for researchers (including sociologists) to move in the direction of pursuing research which is identified as useful in advancing current political agendas.

Here we can point to David Cameron’s “big society” initiative which was announced as a flagship policy by the Conservatives in 2010. According to former Cameron advisor Danny Kruger, “the big society is not about picking up litter: it is meant to be a challenge to the state” (Observer, 5 January 2014: 8). The policy was “crafted as a challenge to the centralized state” and it aimed to bring about a “massive shift in the culture of public service so that power and responsibility are in the hands of local people and the social entrepreneurs who can really change communities.” The policy aimed to devolve some of the running of the state as part of the austerity and tax-cutting program of the Conservatives and to encourage localism, social responsibility, public-private partnerships, charity, and volunteering. The big society idea drew on the thinking of Edmund Burke; E.F. Schumacher; and John Gray, professor of politics at Oxford.

Related to big society thinking, the Cameron government has also shown interest in the promoters of what is called nudge theory, and the area of “resilience” which in the words of Mark Neocleous:

....has in the last decade become one of the key political categories of our time. It falls easily from the mouths of politicians, a variety of state departments are funding research into it, urban planners are now obliged to take it into consideration, and academics are falling over themselves to conduct research on it (Mark Neocleous, “Resisting Resilience,” Radical Philosophy, 178, March/April 2013).

The argument is that these related streams of thought have become politically useful to those pursuing neo-liberal policies which include massive cuts to the welfare state, and the privatization and withdrawal of services by the state as austerity programs are implemented. It is significant that the “big soc.” constellation of ideas has much in common with sociologist Anthony Giddens’ “third way,” which was a key feature of New Labour’s program under Tony Blair in the 1990s. The third way was promoted as a way of renewing social democracy. It has been widely influential and it comes in many versions. It is a recent version of the idea that a middle way can be forged between market capitalism and socialism. It talks about the gradual improvement of society, economy, self and citizen. Its key words are pragmatism, partnership, community, interdependence, trust, and morality. It has been described as a variant of neo-liberalism and a means of shifting responsibility for dealing with a range of social problems and issues from the state onto the community.

Many people connect Cameron’s “big society” idea with the work of E.F. Schumacher, whose book Small is Beautiful was influential beginning in the 1960s:

Long before our current crisis, Schumacher and his ideas were attracting attention here in the UK.
Several of the better themes of David Cameron’s widely disputed “big society” are indistinguishable in their ambition from parts of Small is Beautiful. The prime minister, indeed, has long been interested in Schumacher’s ideas (Robert McCrum, “How EF Schumacher, Author of the Global Bestseller Small is Beautiful, came back into Fashion,” Observer, The New Review, 27 March 2011: 8).

Cameron’s government has implemented a policy which is intended to nudge academics towards studying the “big society” idea as a priority. Funding for the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) will not be cut on condition that the organization agrees to “spend a ‘significant’ amount of its funds on the Prime Minister’s vision for the country” (Daniel Boffey, “Academic Fury over Order to Study the Big Society,” Observer, 27 March 2011: 16). The AHRC receives 100 million pounds sterling each year. This move involves challenging what in Britain is called the “Haldane Principle,” a 90-year-old convention that protects the rights of academic bodies to decide where research funds should be spent.

**Defending Sociology**

The government’s move in this area has generated considerable protest. Gideon Calder of the University of Wales, writing for himself and 68 other academics, has argued that when “academic research is used to promote party political ideologies, its quality and value declines” (Gideon Calder, “Academic Freedom at Risk,” Observer, 3 April 2011: 40).

There is, then, resistance to the government’s political nudging. Some oppose the undermining of academic freedom. Others take a different stance, suggesting that “it is no secret in the social sciences that research agenda priorities are set politically” (Les Back, “Small World, Big Society: Haldane, Willetts and the AHRC,” Sociology and the Cuts, 14 April 2011. Back’s comment is that “the ‘Big Society’ is – sociologically speaking – a nonsense” – but no more “half-baked”, he claims, than “the last government’s obsession with ‘community cohesion.’” He seems to be suggesting that social science researchers respond to what is happening by rejecting the very idea of big society and perhaps rejecting policy-tied, state-financed research. John Brewer talks about the need “to develop a new narrative about impact” and for sociology to engage with the “big issues of the future.” Mark Carrigan writes about “an insurrection of sociologists” (“Reclaiming ‘Impact’ and Commitment Sociology,” The Sociological Imagination, 4 September 2013).

Most people who seek to defend sociology against the criticisms of those who suggest it has failed the relevance test at a time of crisis as well as those who seek to make sociology dance to the tune of particular political parties seem to underestimate the extent to which the discipline has long been embedded in what Solovey called the nexus. What I want to suggest is that sociologists need to examine their role in failed ideas and in neoliberalism’s hegemony. It is important to understand the role the social sciences have played in generating, promoting, and sustaining many of the core ideas of big society thinking. That sociologists have played such a role is not in question: ...there is nothing new about the big society. Labour embraced communitarian ideas, influenced by Robert Putnam’s Bowling Alone call for social capital in an atomised society, and with Richard Sennett’s call for mutual respect in poor communities. Neighbourhood renewal schemes were a hallmark of Labour policy, but you would think Labour’s “V” initiative for young volunteering or Volunteering England never existed (Polly Toynbee, “Big Society isn’t New, but the Tories are Purging the Past,” Guardian, 21 May 2011: 37).

**And so to Sociologists on the Rock**

Using a term such as failed ideas in connection with the crisis is just one way of saying that some
academics got it wrong when it came to theory and practice. But it is not just a case of wrong theory, which can be abandoned or re-thought fairly easily. Ideas have consequences. Policies based on bad ideas do damage to people. The question of exactly how the work of academics relates to political practice and state policy is important. Ideas do not necessarily inform or shape practice in any simple way.

The relationship between academics and policy makers – especially governments – is a complex one. Study of this relationship is difficult and rarely done in Newfoundland. The ways in which the academic world shapes policy are many and varied. Academics can work directly for governments in undertaking research, offering advice, and formulating policy. They can be appointed to commissions of enquiry into problems such as poverty, unemployment, child protection, corruption; or work on the formulation of a Strategic Economic Plan to bring about economic development, as in the case of Newfoundland in the 1990s. The relationship can be formal or informal, short-term or long-term, overt or covert. Academics can also influence governments without working for them and without their advice being sought. They can join political movements and protests, provide advice to those seeking to change policy, criticize governments in private or public. They can campaign for and against change and perform a propaganda function for governments by helping to persuade people that a particular policy is necessary and that it will work to resolve a key problem such as unemployment.

There have been warnings to social scientists involved in policy work. Stan Cohen has pointed to the “tension between intellectual skepticism and political action,” arguing that the social sciences thrive best and depend on a “spirit of skepticism, doubt and uncertainty” and that “answers are always provisional, thought is ambiguous, irony is deliberate.” Further, he suggests that “all this can best be achieved when one is free from pressures of everyday demands – especially those to be ‘relevant’ and to fit and tailor your ideas to serve the managers of society.” However, he also recognizes that in political life decisions have to be made, doubts temporarily put aside, clear public statements made; and values need to be cultivated such as social justice, public safety, and equality (“Intellectual Skepticism and Political Commitment: The Case of Radical Criminology,” Studies in Law, Politics and Society, 13, 1993: 187-209). Because working for governments carries certain dangers, people who engage in such work should be seen as having greater responsibilities.

**Newfoundland: “North America’s Celtic Tiger”**

Talk of academic theory, research and responsibility, and the impact of this work on state policy may seem of little relevance to people in Newfoundland. However, I want to argue that the kinds of questions being asked about economics, sociology, and other disciplines should also be asked in a Newfoundland context. A local movement developed in Newfoundland in the 1990s which celebrated the Irish and Icelandic models of social and economic development. Both these countries were early casualties of the financial crisis, with quite far-reaching and damaging consequences for their populations. There is a need to explain why Canadian intellectuals, academics, and politicians embraced the now failed Irish and Icelandic models of development.

The phrase “North America’s Celtic Tiger” has been applied to Newfoundland by Joshua D. Lalor (“Ethnicity, Culture, and Globalization: Exploring the Memorandum of Understanding between Newfoundland and Labrador and Ireland,” Newfoundland and Labrador Studies, 24, 1, 2009: 25-53). The term “Celtic Tiger” was coined in the early 1990s. Its first recorded use was in August 1994 by Kevin Gardiner, an economist working for Morgan Stanley, who chose the term to, in his words, “jazz up” a rather stodgy report that he had written about Ireland. The phrase was a rhetorical device, specifically intended to catch people’s attention and link what was happening in Ireland with the Asian Tiger phenomenon.

In Newfoundland, those involved in policy formulation or what may be called “intentional development” have long engaged in policy borrowing. The embracing of the Celtic Tiger model
by politicians and intellectuals in Newfoundland has a history which is related to the creation of the Economic Recovery Commission by the Liberal government of Clyde Wells in 1989, an agency which was headed by Memorial University sociology professor Douglas House. Lalor’s article, at least in part, examines the way Newfoundland embraced the Celtic Tiger phenomenon and established connections with Ireland including a Memorandum of Understanding between the governments of the Republic of Ireland and the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador – signed in 1996 and reaffirmed in 1999 and 2004. The aim was to facilitate technology transfer, joint business ventures, research and development, cooperative training activities, academic interchange, cultural events and industries, and environmental management/environmental industries. Laudatory articles called on Newfoundlanders to follow the path mapped by the Celtic Tiger abounded in the period up to the financial crash of 2008. In March 2004, Danny Williams, the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, argued that “we can be the next Ireland” (see Lalor: 17).

Iceland was also promoted as a model for Newfoundland to follow. It was declared to be “the hippest spot in Europe” in one hymn of praise. Writers, film makers, academics, and politicians all jumped on the Icelandic bandwagon. In April 2008 Geir Haarde, the Prime Minister of Iceland, was in St. John’s giving the John Kenneth Galbraith Lecture in Public Policy at Memorial University’s Harris Centre. Memorial University’s Gazette ran a story about this event:

A rugged island in the North Atlantic, known for its fish stocks, was named the number one place in the world in which to live by the United Nations.

The Success of Iceland, Europe’s coolest country, holds innumerable lessons for Newfoundland and Labrador as this province embarks on its own economic boom (Janet Harron, “Iceland Leader to Deliver Galbraith,” Gazette, 40, 12 April 2008: 1).

We were told that as of November 2007 Iceland topped the list of counties on the United Nations Human Development Index, which measures life expectancy, literacy, education, standard of living, and GDP per capita. We were also told that the country had “a highly advanced economy, favourable demographics, a fully-funded pension scheme, strong government finances and proven economic flexibility.”

The title of Haarde’s talk was “Small Country, Big Results: The Case of Iceland.” He made much of Iceland’s success and emphasized the importance of small countries pursuing the right policies and having confidence in order for this to happen. Haarde’s visit to Newfoundland involved co-signing an agreement with Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams to strengthen the ties between the two jurisdictions. At the signing, Williams claimed: “There’s a lot of things we can learn from a very modern, progressive society that’s very similar to our own, from a cultural perspective” (Steve Bartlett, “MOU Signed between Newfoundland, Iceland,” Telegram, 15 April 2008: A3). This was yet another event in the love affair with Iceland that has been long simmering in Newfoundland.

Newfoundland was not alone in boosting and embracing the Irish model. (See, Joseph Harris, “Ireland Unleashed,” Smithsonian, 35, 12, 2005: 80-88). But for those who did not live through this period in Newfoundland it must be hard to imagine the force with which the Celtic and Icelandic models were promoted in the second half of the 1990s and through much of the first decade of the 21st century.

But in late 2008 all this unraveled in short order. It did so without much in the way of an intellectual postmortem which looked at how the South Sea Bubble mania of the Irish and Icelandic models was embraced in the 1990s in Newfoundland.

It is important that we understand what happened. And this should be done while asking questions about the politics, patronage and the social science nexus, the impact of academic work, and the role of academics in myth-making. One question which needs to be asked is why those intellectuals, academics and politicians who promoted failed
ideas have failed to acknowledge and take responsibility for their own failures.

I hope to pursue these issues in a future essay.

THE CLIPBOARD

By Stephen Riggins

Cinema Politica St. John’s, founded in April 2013, hosted its 10th screening in January 2014. The group has shown a variety of films on topics including gender (“Buying Sex” and “Status Quo? The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada”), environmental issues (“Vanishing of the Bees” and “Salmon Confidential”), and resource extraction in Canada and abroad (“The Pipe,” “Shattered Ground,” and “White Water, Black Gold”). Cinema Politica St. John’s has collaborated with a number of local groups to co-host screenings and raise funds for various organizations. Collaborators include the St. John’s office of the National Film Board, the Newfoundland Food Security Network, The People and The Sea Film Festival, and the Department of Sociology’s Oil and Development course.

Attendance at the film screenings has far exceeded expectations and the community (both at MUN and beyond) has been very receptive. Ph.D. candidate Stephanie Sodero has been writing excellent film reviews for the screened films, which are published in the online Newfoundland newspaper The Independent prior to the screenings. Overall, Cinema Politica St. John’s has been a huge success!

The screening on January 21 was “Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change,” shown in collaboration with MUN’s Aboriginal Resource Office. In February the screening will be “The End of Immigration?” in collaboration with the On The Move Research Project (Department of Sociology students and faculty, including Kathy Fitzpatrick and Barb Neis, are involved in this international research collaborative). By Paula Graham.

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The following is a list of university and college professors of sociology and related fields such as social work, who have received their undergraduate or graduate education in the MUN department of sociology. We know the list is incomplete. Please tell us who we have inadvertently overlooked.

University of Victoria (Seantel Anaïs and Cecilia Benoit),
University of British Columbia (Anne Martin-Matthews and Ralph Matthews),
University of Alberta (Gordon Fearn),
University of Saskatchewan (Les Samuelson),
Lakehead University (Curtis Fogel),
University of Waterloo (John McLevey),
Dalhousie University (Peter Butler and John David Flint),
St. Francis Xavier University (John Phyne and Lynda Harling Stalker),
St. Mary’s University (Audrey MacNevin),
University of New Brunswick (Will van den Hoonoord),
College of the North Atlantic (Terry Murphy),
University of Isfahan, Iran (Masoud Kianpour).
Memorial University (Linda Cohen, Stephen Crocker, Linda Cullum, Douglas House, Robert Lewis, Anne Morris, Barbara Neis, Susanne Ottenheimer, Nicole Power, Paul Ripley, and Sharon Taylor).
University of Texas at Austin (Allyson Stokes, postdoc)
University of Oxford, Research Fellow, Oxford Internet Institute (Bernie Hogan)

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Lisa Kaida has been appointed Associate Academic Director, Memorial University’s Statistics Canada Research Data Centre.

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Department Presentations of M.A. Research Papers

Ghana: Evidence from the Ghana Demographic Health Survey.”

Jessica Frenette, “Worlds Apart – From Central America to Africa: An Examination of How to do Development in the 21st Century.”


Francis Walsh, “The Enemy Within: Presenting a Structured Model to Analyze the Effects of Stress on Police Officer Health and Performance.”

Some recent Publications


http://mun.academia.edu/MarkStoddart/Reports

Mark Stoddart and Paula Graham (2013) “Cultivating Tourism Mobility on the Burin Peninsula.”

http://mun.academia.edu/MarkStoddart/Reports


http://www.interfacejournal.net/2013/05/interfa ce-volume-5-issue-1-anticolonial-and-postcolonial-movements/


Qian Wei and Tanya Goyal joined Dr. Linda Cullum on the Take Back the Night Walk in St. John’s.