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IMPACT, RELEVANCY, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH:

Lessons from the Participation and Public Policy (PPP) Experience

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Introduction

This report presents the results of an impact assessment study designed "to deepen understanding of how development research, as supported by the IDRC, has contributed to making a difference in people's lives and, from that, to enable the Centre to fulfil more efficiently its role as a development organization and knowledge broker" (IDRC-Terms of Reference, 1997). The projects selected for this study are: Representative Institutions and Public Policy in Argentina (3-P87-0313); Participation and Public Policy in Costa Rica (3-P-87-1053); and, Participation and Local Governments in Cuba (3-P-87-1053).

The report is divided into six sections. Section I offers a summary of the main objectives, arguments and conclusions of the three projects under consideration. Section II reviews the institutional context within which the projects were discussed and approved by the IDRC. Section III discusses the issues of impact and relevancy in social science policy oriented research using the three selected projects as case studies. Section IV identifies and discusses some key lessons about research and social responsibility extracted from the selected case studies. Section V offers an overview of the impact of globalization on the social science research agenda of Latin America. Section VI discusses some of the implications of this study for the IDRC.

I. THE PROJECTS

This section contains a brief description of the central objectives, arguments and conclusions of the three projects under consideration. Understanding the fundamental nature of these projects is essential to understanding their impact on the policy making processes that they explored and studied.

Representative Institutions and Public Policy in Argentina

The Argentinean project analyzed the phenomenon of participation and public policy at the

national level. Its main objective was to understand the role of economic corporations in the formulation and implementation of public policy in Argentina during the government of Raul Alfonsín between 1983 and 1989.

At a theoretical level, the project explored the relationship between the **Régimen Social de Acumulación**, or Social Regime of Accumulation (SRA), and the **Régimen Político de Gobierno** or Political Regime of Government (PRG). The Social Regime of Accumulation was defined as "a construction that refers to the complex and changing structure of institutions and practices that have a direct effect on the process of capital accumulation" (Nun, 1990, 6). The Political Regime of Government refers to "the institutions, processes, and practices that are conventionally called 'political' such as public administration, parties, elections, etc...." (Nun, 1990, 8).

The study of the relationship between the Social Regime of Accumulation and the Political Regime of Government was focused on the examination of the relationship between economic corporations and the state in the period 1983-89. This relationship is seen by the researchers as "one of the central forms of articulations between the PRG and the SRA" (Nun, 1990, 2). The researchers' central argument was that the democratization of Argentina requires the transformation of both the Political Regime of Government that was inherited by the elected government of Raul Alfonsín in 1983, and the Social Regime of Accumulation that has operated in the country since its emergence in the 1930's. Furthermore, it requires the democratic articulation between the two.

Prior to 1983, Argentina had developed a Political Regime of Government that left little room for mechanisms of political participation and political representation to develop and function, and allowed corporations to negotiate directly with the government to define the public policy agenda. The process of transition to democracy that was formally inaugurated in 1983 had the capacity to open a range of possibilities for the democratic re-articulation of the relationship between the PRG and the SRA. However, Alfonsín's attempt to democratize this relationship was hampered by both the weakness of the Argentinean state and the fragmented nature of the corporatist structure of representation in the country. Although the Argentinean state permeates the entire social structure of the country, it is unable to formulate and implement policies in a

relatively independent manner. It is "central" to the life of the Argentinean society, but not "strong" because it is "colonized" by corporations (Nun, 1990, 11-12). This condition fragments the state's actions and limits its capacity to formulate and implement public policies in response to social demands formulated outside the corporatist structure of representation. Those policies dealing with fundamental issues such as land tenure, resource allocation, and income and surplus distribution were systematically blocked by the corporations and could not be implemented by the Alfonsín government. Only those policies that were considered neutral and did not significantly affect the power structure of the country were implemented. An example of a neutral policy is the one formulated by the Alfonsín government to restructure the Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria (Lattuada, 1991, 168).

Thus the "colonization" of the state by corporations, and the consequent fragmentation of its power rendered the Alfonsín government unable to redefine and democratize the relationship between the Political Regime of Government and the Social Regime of Accumulation. The weakness of the Argentinean state was further accentuated by the crisis in the public finances of the country and expressed in its low administrative capacity.

The fragmentation of the structure of representation of corporate interests was another impediment for the democratic re-synchronization of the relationship between the Social Regime of Accumulation and the Political Regime of Government. The researchers highlight this fragmentation in their study of the corporatist structure of representation in the Argentinean economy's agricultural and industrial sectors.

The structure of representation of corporate interests in the agricultural sector of Argentina is divided into four main entities: the Sociedad Rural Argentina or Argentinean Rural Society (SRA), the Federación Agraria Argentina or Argentinean Agrarian Federation (FAA), the Confederaciones Rurales Argentinas or Argentinean Rural Confederations (CRA), and the Confederación Intercorporativa Agropecuaria or Intercoperative Farming Confederation (CONINAGRO) (Lattuada, 1990, 17). These organizations differ among themselves in terms of their constituencies, levels of organization and ideological orientation (Nun, 1990, 17).

The corporatist structure of representation includes national organizations such as the Unión Industrial Argentina or Argentinean Industrial Union (UIA), the Consejo Argentino de la

Industria or Argentinean Council of Industry (CAI), and the Confederación General de la Industria or General Confederation of Industry (CGI); chambers and associations organized by product, industrial branch and region; associations of big enterprises; and, multisectorial fronts (Lattuada, 1990, 3-13).

The weakness of the Argentinean state, combined with the fragmentation of the structure of representation of corporate interests in the private sector renders difficult the formulation of either "meso-corporatist" or "macro-corporatist" pacts that can open the door for the democratic re-synchronization of the relationship between the Social Regime of Accumulation and the Political Regime of Government (Nun, 1990, 21). This is illustrated by four case studies of government attempts to achieve corporatist pacts. These include: the Programa Nacional Agropecuario or National Farmer Program (PRONAGRO), the Comisión de Concertación Política Lechera or Milk Policy Negotiation Commission (COCOPOLE), the Fondo de Promoción de la Actividad Lechera or Fund for Promotion of Milk Activity (FOPAL), the pharmaceutical industry, and the micro-electronics industry.

The project also studied the possibility of building corporatist pacts at the regional level in the study of *concertación social* (social negotiation or coordination) in the provinces of Córdoba and Rio Negro. The problem of the fragmentation of the state and of the corporatist structure of representation identified by the researchers at the national level reemerged in these regional studies. However, the researchers argue that the formulation of mesocorporatist pacts is an avenue that requires more exploration.

The conclusions of the study are not very optimistic: the Alfonsín's government's failure to democratize relations between the Social Regime of Accumulation and the Political Regime of Government in Argentina "confirmed the existence of corporatist citadels that are immune to the vote of the popular majority (Nun, 1990, 16). The project offered important policy guidelines and recommendations. In general terms, the researchers argue that the Alfonsín government should have strengthened the capacity of those state agencies central to the process of *concertación social* to penetrate these citadels and to democratize the relationship between the PRG and the SRA. The state should also have mobilized political support from inside and outside the corporations to support the government initiatives (Nun, 1991, 16). José Nun

explains:

The point was to define the game and to initiate it while reserving the right to admit into the game only those participants that were willing to obey the rules. Rather than doing this, the government opened a discussion about the game itself...(Nun, 1991, 10).

These general conclusions and recommendations are broken down into more specific political and policy suggestions in the different studies produced by this project. A summary of them is offered by José Nun in the report that he prepared during this consultancy.

Participation and Local Governments in Cuba

The Cuban project offered a unique opportunity to study the phenomenon of participation within the context of a socialist regime. The project was designed to evaluate local governments both as mechanisms of popular participation and as structures of government (Dilla and González, 1991, 7). The evaluation was based on a detailed study of the organization and functioning of local governments in four municipalities: Bayamo, Centro Habana, Santa Cruz del Norte and Chambas.

The study of participation in Cuba requires an understanding of the historical context of the Cuban political system since the revolution in 1959. This historical context can be divided into two periods: The period of charismatic authority covering the 1960's and early 1970's and the period of revolutionary legal-formal authority from the mid-1970's to the present.

The first period was characterized by high levels of centralization of power in the Communist Party and, more specifically, in its leader, Fidel Castro. During this period, "the essence of the political system was the direct relationship of Castro with the people" (Ritter, 1980, 33). According to A.R.M. Ritter,

The political system throughout the 1960's, and especially in the latter half of that decade, can be considered to be "democratically representative" neither in the sense that mechanisms were used or even existed for the popular selection of the leadership, nor in the sense that people were able to influence policy making through formal mechanisms. It is very important to emphasize, however, that despite this, policies were formulated which were highly beneficial to the large majority of the population. With surprising

success, these policies redistributed income, reduced urban-rural disparities, virtually eliminated "open" unemployment and achieved universal access to education and public health as well as sports (Ritter, 1980, 35).

This situation changed dramatically during the 1970's after the leadership of the revolution announced the beginning of a process of institutionalization of the political regime (Dilla and González, 1991, 4).

From the researchers' perspective, the process of institutionalization of the 1970's represented a significant step toward the consolidation of participatory democracy in Cuba. This position was corroborated by Ritter in 1980 when he wrote that:

despite the position of the Party, I conclude, tentatively that at the local level, where citizens select candidates and directly elect their representatives, "democracy" defined in terms of control over leadership selection exists to some degree (Ritter, 1980, 64).

Through interviews, direct observation, and the study of documents, the project concluded that the election of municipal authorities takes place "in a climate of liberty" (Dilla and Gonzalez, 1991, 35). The accountability of the municipal government authorities is facilitated by **Reuniones de Rendición de Cuenta (RRC)**, which also function as mechanisms of aggregation and transmission of popular demands. However, problems such as excessive formalism, individualism, and bureaucratization seriously limit the capacity of the RRC to function as effective mechanisms of popular control on local governments. Furthermore, the Municipal Assemblies that function as the expression of state power at the municipal level, are viewed by the researchers as important mechanisms for participation in the municipal decision making process. However, they can not be characterized as the centre of state power at the local level. Lack of administrative capacity and inexperience are some of the factors that limit the role and potential development of the Municipal Assemblies.

The capacity of the municipal governments to govern is also limited by the centralist tendencies of the national and provincial governments within which municipal authorities operate (Dilla and González, 1991, 54). The enhancement of the capacity would require a redefinition of the state-society relations that were established by the revolution in 1959. In this relation, civil society is seen as a monolithic body functioning in an harmonious relationship with the state.

Even considering its undoubted achievements, Cuba's municipal participation system has been hampered by excessive formality and bureaucracy, so that the final result falls short of what was wanted and planned in the original design. The system has consequently produced an unwanted result in encouraging a rather paternalistic, top-down relationship between local government and the community, all in a fundamentally parochial surrounding. Sustained community self-government experiences are few, while the differential appeals of participation remain stark. The meagre performance of representative institutions vis-à-vis their prerogatives as top state authorities in their respective territories is also a negative factor (Dilla and González, 1996).

The researchers argue in favour of a reconceptualization of the traditional relationship between the central state and local governments in order to come to terms with the issue of diversity within civil society:

A substantial primary principle is the need to advance more pluralistic political styles, which will eventually encourage greater vigour and autonomy on the part of civil society. From a logical point of view, the issue seems simple enough: every society is diverse - class, gender, generational differences exist, and so democratic public activity can be expressed only through pluralism. Politically, the issue is much more complex because, among other reasons, of the rejection professed by most Marxists for the very concept of pluralism, and also because of the limited use made of it by the liberal academy, which tends to limit the concept of democracy to institutional arrangements (Dilla, González, 1996).

Their recommendation is not to adopt the liberal conception of pluralism, but to adopt a socialist interpretation of the concept. This involves the need to provide "more autonomy to the political associations that operate within civil society and a redefinition of their obsolete role as 'transmission belts' from the people to the state" (Dilla and González, 1991, 59).

Participation and Public Policy in Costa Rica

The Costa Rican project explored the limitations of, and possibilities for participation and popular democracy in Costa Rica. Specifically, it analyzed the emergence and evolution of the housing committees, and their impact on the struggle for housing in the communities of Guarari, Carmen Lyra, Oscar Felipe and El Nazareno.

The housing committees emerged in Costa Rica in the late 1970's as popular political responses to the shortage of affordable housing for low-income families (Lara and Molina, 1991,

4). During the early 1980's they developed into effective pressure groups operating in association with traditional political parties under the name of "fronts for housing." The project analyzes the impact and evolution of the following four housing fronts: the Coordinadora Patriótica Nacional or National Patriotic Coordinator (COPAN), the Frente Democrático de la Vivienda or Democratic Housing Front (FDV), the Frente Costarricense de la Vivienda or Costa Rican Housing Front (FCV) and the Asociación Nacional para la Vivienda or National Association for Housing (ANAVI). According to the researchers, these housing fronts were successful in pressuring the states to respond to popular demands for housing. However, by the late 1980's the role and orientation of the housing committees and the housing fronts had been depoliticized. They had been transformed from "pressure groups and sources of conflict into organizations constructing houses in close collaboration with the government" (Lara and Molina, 1991, p. 7).

To understand the phenomenon of participation in Costa Rica, it is necessary to understand the evolution of the pattern of state-society relations that emerged in this country after the civil war of 1948. The winning political force in this conflict had as one of its central objectives, the diversification of the productive base of the country to avoid dependency on coffee and to allow new social groups to participate in the economic and political life of the Costa Rican society. As Rovira explains:

The power structure [of Costa Rica] was altered after the civil war of 1948. From that moment the middle bourgeoisie, in close alliance with the urban bourgeoisie, began to occupy a better position in the national power structure. The old fractions of the ruling class --composed of the agro-exporting elements of society that emerged in the 19th century were then forced to make concessions to other social groups during the second half of the present century (Rovira, 1982, 177).

The organization of the new social relations emerging from the war of 1948 required a strong state with the capacity to "manage the regime" and respond to contradictory social demands (Rovira, 1982, 43). To achieve these objectives, the government introduced three fundamental changes in the organization and functioning of the Costa Rican society: the elimination of the army, the nationalization of the banking system, and expansion of the scope of the state. These changes gave the Costa Rican state the capacity to define the rules of economic competition and to manage political conflict within the boundaries of the established regime (see Molina and

Lara, 1990, 27-31).

The pattern of state-society relations that Costa Rica developed after 1948 has been significantly reshaped since the early 1980's when the government began to promote the internationalization of the national economy beyond the traditional scope of the Central American region. This decision was to a considerable extent the result of pressures and recommendations of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reduce the scope of the state and to strengthen the capacity of the market to lead the national economy (see Molina and Lara, 1990, 32-34).

The redefinition of the role of the Costa Rican state was reflected in the creation of the Sistema Financiero Nacional para la Vivienda (National Financial System for Housing) in 1986. The new organization was created in response to the challenge posed to the government by the housing committees and the housing fronts. It established that the state would only be responsible for the financing of housing facilities for needy families. The beneficiaries of the state financial assistance would absorb the cost of design, planning, and building of the houses (Molina and Lara, 1990, 34-37).

The same year, the newly elected government of Oscar Arias signed a pact with COPAN, FDV, and FCV --three of the most important housing fronts. According to this pact, the government would begin massive construction of housing for those represented by the fronts. In return, the fronts would depoliticize their activities. Popular participation in the implementation of the housing programs would be oriented toward practical purposes rather than political ones.

In this context, the housing committees and the housing fronts were transformed into instruments of government policy. COPAN, for example, began to operate as a "private construction enterprise working directly with the government to develop state housing policies" (Molina and Lara, 1991, 7). In other words, "not only was the system capable of confronting the crisis and containing the conflict, but, without much resistance, it converted the crisis into the process of neo-liberal change and structural adjustment policies that had such terrible consequences for the living conditions of the popular sectors. As of 1986, the belligerence of the housing committees was turned into support for and co-ordination with state actions" (Lara and Molina, 1996, 51).

Participation, then, was transformed into what Denis Goulet has called a "form of do it yourself problem solving in small-scale operations" (Goulet, 1989, 176). This type of participation is not designed to question or challenge the rules of the game, but simply to survive within those rules. In the final analysis, the housing committees became, according to the researchers, "a strategy for survival" (Lara and Molina, 1991, 19).

The redefinition of state's role that took place during the 1980's represented a fundamental change in the organization of social and political life in Costa Rica, and, more specifically, in the nature of state-society relations that developed in this country after 1948. The main function of the Costa Rican state is no longer to "manage the regime" but to support the development of a market oriented economy (see COREC, 29-31). Participation in this context is increasingly viewed as the mobilization of people's energy to support the state, and through it, the development of a transnationalized market-regulated economy.

II. THE CONTEXT WITHIN THE IDRC

The three projects under review were supported through the Participation and Public Policy (PPP) experimental program established within the Social Science Division of the IDRC in March of 1997. Before the launching of the PPP, the IDRC did not support research in the field of political studies. This is not to say that the IDRC was not aware of the political implications and consequences of social science research; however, politics was treated by the Centre as an implicit variable affecting research and social development. The establishment of the PPP represented a significant change in the Centre's treatment of political phenomena and expressed an emerging willingness to promote the study of politics in an explicit and systematic way.

It is important to point out that the IDRC's decision to establish the PPP experimental program was the direct result of fundamental changes taking place in Latin America. More specifically, the organization of the PPP experimental program was induced by the emergence of parallel processes of demilitarization and democratization which took place in several Latin America countries during the 1980's. Researchers in several of the countries affected by these

changes were asking the IDRC to support research activities to explore the role and the functions of political institutions, actors and processes within the framework of transitions to democracy. Moreover, demilitarization and democratization made it feasible, and relatively safe, for the IDRC to support research in the sensitive area of politics in Latin America. The following is a transcript of the document that expressed the rationale, objectives and operational strategy of the PPP experimental program:

During the last two years, the Centre has critically reviewed its own experience to further develop its capacity to contribute to the social and economic advancement of developing countries. During this process of reflection, the Centre has consistently expressed concern in regard to the impact of the research activities it supports on the problems of the most disadvantaged social groups of developing countries. In the Program and Policy Review VIII (1987/88-1990/91), for example, it is stated that:

The Board's desire for increased emphasis on implementation of research results is shared by Centre management. Greater efforts should be made to ensure that promising technologies or approaches resulting from Centre-supported work are followed through to introduction and implementation.

Since public policies are key mechanisms for the implementation of research results, the Centre considered that the discussions of research impact should include an analysis of the nature of the process of public policy formulation and implementation in developing countries.

Most well-informed experts in the field of policy studies recognize that public policies are not only the result of technical choices among alternatives but also the outcome of the interaction of different bureaucratic and political groups with different interests and political power. Some experts even argue that it is the process of implementation of public policies and not the process of policy formulation that constitutes the most important focus of political and bureaucratic competition in developing countries.

Rationale

- a) The capacity and willingness of public institutions to formulate and implement public policies is limited by political and bureaucratic factors. Consequently, research projects that attempt to have a maximum early impact should realistically ascertain the political organizational and administrative environment in which their recommendations pertain.
- b) The capacity or willingness of social institutions to formulate and implement policies that address the problems of the most disadvantaged social groups of developing countries largely depends on the capacity of these groups to influence the process of policy formulation and implementation. The influence of these groups is made effective through a variety of mechanisms of political representation such as political parties,

unions, interest groups, etc.

Objectives:

The objectives of the PPP program are to support research projects that:

- a) analyze the political and administrative factors that condition the processes of formulation and implementation of specific public policies;
- b) identify political and administrative strategies which maximize the opportunities for research results to have an impact on the process of formulation and implementation of public policies with the objective of improving the distribution of social resources; and,
- c) explore the possibilities to facilitate the participation of the most disadvantaged sectors of developing countries in the process of formulation and implementation of public policies.

Operational Strategy

Research Areas

- a) **Political Analysis of Processes of Formulation and Implementation of Public Policies.**

In collaboration with other divisions of the Centre, the program will develop research projects that attempt to analyze the role of different political and bureaucratic actors in the processes of formulation and implementation of specific public policies at the national, regional and social levels. The general objectives of these projects will be to formulate feasible alternative public policies to improve the distribution of social resources.

- b) **Political Actors and Institutions**

Within this area, the program will concentrate on the analysis of the functions, structures and evolution of key actors and institutions involved in the formulation and implementation of public policies. The understanding of the nature of these actors within various levels of government, is essential to understand their role in the process of formulation and implementation of public policies. Examples of these key actors are: the state apparatus, political parties and unions.

Levels of Analysis

During its experimental phase, the program will develop projects that analyze the linkages between political participation/representation and public policies at various levels of government. For example, at the micro level, the program could support the analysis of grass-roots organizations in the formulation and/or the implementation of specific public policies by local governments, or the analysis of NGO's as mechanisms of aggregation of popular demands. At the macro level, the program could support the analysis of formal political institutions such as unions and parties in the formulation of national policies or the analysis of the structure, functions and evolution of party systems.

The above proposal had three advantages. First, the rationale, objectives and operational strategy for the proposed program responded to the mandate and mission of the IDRC. Second, its objectives reflected an existing concern of the Centre's Board of Governors for increased emphasis on the impact and implementation of research results (IDRC, 1986). Third, the proposal identified a feasible, legitimate and relevant research area. Most importantly, it did not advocate any single notion of democracy, nor did it imply the possibility of transferring the democratic experience of Canada to developing countries. It is within this context that the PPP activity was launched in Latin America. Unfortunately, several internal organizational reforms within the IDRC prevented the PPP activity from realizing its full potential as a research program. This consultancy provides the IDRC with the opportunity to rescue some important lessons offered by the projects supported through this initiative.

III. IMPACT AND RELEVANCY IN SOCIAL SCIENCE POLICY ORIENTED RESEARCH: LESSONS FROM THE PPP EXPERIENCE.

Before discussing the outputs, reach and impact of the three projects under study, it is essential to establish the proper conceptual framework to analyze the scientific value, as well as the political and policy implications and consequences of these initiatives. The "Terms of Reference" for the present paper offered important and relevant conceptual considerations that facilitated the present study. However, the analysis of the three projects under consideration shows the need to further refine the conceptual framework within which the IDRC tries "to extend its understanding of the influence its development research activities have had over the

past 25 years" (IDRC-Terms of Reference, 1). More specifically, the present analysis highlights the need to develop a conceptual framework to discuss and assess the nature of "research impacts", taking into consideration the specific and special nature of **social science policy oriented research**. Both the Terms of Reference and the Concept Paper for this paper provide a solid, **general** point of departure for the development of this framework. These two documents were designed not as restrictive and inflexible conceptual guidelines but mainly as an organizing device and an analytical point of reference "to generate recommendations for improving the development and management of research projects toward realizing more and better impacts more effectively;" and, "to develop a user-friendly framework for assessing and fostering the impact of development research (IDRC-Terms of Reference, 2).

It is on the basis of these stated objectives that this consultancy tried to extract lessons from the three case studies under consideration to provide the IDRC not only with answers to the questions included in the Terms of Reference and the Concept Paper, but also, with ideas and arguments that the IDRC could use to enrich the meaning and significance of the very questions that the Centre need to ask itself and others in order to understand, explain and improve its own work and performance.

The Specificity of Social Science Research

The case studies under consideration illustrate the need to establish the specificity of the nature of social science research in any attempt to understand the nature of research impacts and the factors that influence them. This is especially true in view of the tendency that exists to assess the role and contributions of social sciences from the perspective of the natural sciences. To identify the specificity of social science research and knowledge it is useful to review three of the most important paradigms of relations between knowledge and reality in the field of social studies.¹

¹This section relies heavily on the work of Charles Taylor and Christopher Lloyd (see Taylor 1983 and Lloyd 1983).

The Positivist Paradigm

Influenced by the experience of natural science, the positivist paradigm in social science assumes the existence of an objective reality that operates outside and independently from the researcher. From this perspective, the role of social science research is simply to produce objective knowledge of reality in order to manipulate it. Knowledge, according to this perspective, can and should be separated from the researcher's personal values. Research impact from a positivist perspective can be assessed in terms of a) the capacity for research results to explain reality as it is; and, b) in terms of its capacity to change this reality within the framework of what is possible at a given point in time.

Pragmatism is the philosophical perspective that has informed the development of the positivist orientation in social science research, especially in North America. Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that became predominant in the United States early this century. Pragmatism devalued historical as well as theoretical and philosophical analysis. As a philosophical movement, pragmatism advocated the notion that "the test and justification of ideas lies in their contributory function of shaping future experiences" (Thayer, 1970, 22). From this perspective, pragmatism "does not insist upon antecedent phenomena but upon consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but upon the possibilities of action" (Coser, 1971, 14). Pragmatism's orientation is ahistorical and voluntaristic in so far as it "stresses the place of choice, decision, purpose and norms in social action" (Gould, 1964).

As a philosophical movement pragmatism perceived the world as offering unlimited possibilities. Within this vision knowledge has an instrumental value and ideas are measured according to their capacity to control the evolution of history. Dwight Waldo explains:

Since the truth of an idea is determined by (or is) what it does, it is in some sense an *instrument*. Impatience with the "abstract" or "theoretical", and use of such terms as scientific, experience, empirical, practicability, experiment --these characterize the pragmatic temper (Waldo, 1955, 17).

That pragmatism emerged and developed in the United States during the first two decades of the present century should not be a surprise. The country was quickly emerging as a world superpower and American social thinkers were increasingly unwilling to seriously study socio-

structural and historical constraints on human agency. Human choice and the power of technology were seen as the main forces determining social evolution. The world was taken for granted and the promise of American life was transformed into a secular faith.

As we can see, pragmatism assumed the legitimacy of the existing context of power relations. For the pragmatic mind, the main answers to the most fundamental questions about the organization of social, political and economic life, had been found. Therefore, the objective of social science research was simply to find ways of making the institutionalized system more effective and more efficient.

Relativistic Approach

The relativistic approach in social science argues that objective and scientific explanations of reality are impossible in the field of social studies. From this perspective, there is no such a thing as universal laws of human and social nature or "fundamental truths" that can be applied everywhere irrespective of history, culture, politics and traditions. Truth and knowledge from this perspective are relative to time and space. Social science research, according to the relativistic approach must understand and internalize the contextual underlying principles and premises that condition the behaviour and actions that research tries to understand and explain. The impact of research from this perspective can only be assessed locally and contextually.

Interpretive Approach

The interpretive approach, which is the most widely accepted view of the nature of social science research and knowledge disputes the arguments and conclusions of the positivist and the relativistic approach. The interpretive approach argues that the positivist position in regard to the nature of social reality and of the role of social science research is mistaken and misleading. There is no such a thing as an objective social reality that is independent from the researcher and his/her values. Therefore, the positivist attempt to apprehend reality as an independent entity is

by who?

futile.

The interpretive approach also disputes the main premises and arguments of the relativistic approach. By creating an over-contextualized view of social reality, the relativistic approach renounces the possibility for knowledge to guide the articulation of common principles for human behaviour. It renounces, in other words, the possibility of identifying and creating a universal value framework from which to assess, explore and improve the human condition.

According to the interpretive approach, the purpose of social theory is "to make social reality explicit" (Taylor, 1983). However, this approach points out, by making social reality explicit, social theory has the capacity to shape the very reality that it tries to explain. Social reality from this perspective does not exist outside knowledge and outside the mind of researchers. Social reality is socially constructed through the very interpretations of reality that social science generates and reproduces. Social theory and social science research results, therefore, are "constitutive of social reality" (Taylor, 1983). An example of this is the transition from the welfare state to the current and increasingly predominant neo-liberal view of the "proper" role of the state and the "proper" nature of state-society relations. While this transition took place as a result of some fundamental changes in the nature of the national economies of the Western world, it is also true that the transition is the result of the success enjoyed by neo-liberal theoretical and conceptual perspectives of the state, economy and society. This success is not simply the result of neo-liberal social science perspectives' capacity to represent and explain an objective reality that operates outside the mind of neo-liberal social scientists. Their success is, more than anything else, the capacity to create and legitimize a new way of looking at the world; the creation and legitimation of social reality through social knowledge always requires the uses of power.

The double function of social science knowledge as **explanation** of social reality and as an **social influence** with the capacity to change the very reality that it is trying to explain allows us to distinguish between at least two different standards that can be used to assess the value and significance of social science research: **relevancy** and **impact**.

By **relevancy** we mean the capacity for social science research to articulate historically authentic, and scientifically valid and legitimate explanations and interpretations of social

*Rationalisation
is used to justify*

*That's the main
point of the
text. It's about
the power of
social science.*

phenomena. By **impact**, we mean the capacity for social science research to shape the way in which society functions. "Impact" according to the IDRC's Concept Paper "is what happens when someone engages with or is influenced by an outcome or result of research" (5). "Project impacts", according to the Terms of Reference for this paper, "are the ways in which the project 'makes a difference' to an individual, group or policy system" (IDRC-Terms of Reference, 4).

Any attempt to understand the value and implications of social science research requires differentiation between **relevancy** and **impact**. From this perspective, the value and significance of social knowledge and theory can be measured in terms of its relevancy (capacity to make social reality explicit) as well as in terms of its direct effects on the reality that it is trying to explain (for example, capacity to reorient processes of public policy making and implementation).

The relationship between **relevancy** and **impact** is a very complex one. This is to say the **impact** of research is not necessarily correlated with its **relevancy**. Highly relevant research can have negligible effects on social reality while highly irrelevant research can have a direct and important impact on the same reality. The relevancy of a social science research project depends predominantly on the intellectual capacity of the researchers involved. In other words, relevancy is a function of the capacity for social science researchers to identify socially important topics and to approach the study of these topics in accordance with the fundamental scientific requirements of their own disciplines. Impact, on the other hand, requires more than scientific skills and capacity. Impact, or the capacity for social science research to shape the way in which society functions, requires power or the uses of power. The reasons for this are relatively simple to explain: society functions through organized structures of social relationships. These structures are power structures; that is, they are organized around dominant social interests. To change the organization of social reality is to change the power structures upon which society is organized.

From this perspective, the capacity for social science research to influence the functioning of society depends on its power to change existing social relations; or, on its capacity to produce results that are compatible with existing social power arrangements.

The PPP experimental program was concerned with research relevancy and impact. In

terms of relevancy, the PPP experimental activity was concerned with the development of a better understanding of the framework of possibilities and limitations within which researchers operate. More specifically, it was concerned with generating an understanding of the political and social forces that condition public policy making and implementation. At the same time, the projects supported by the PPP experimental activity were designed with the objective of shaping and conditioning the very processes they were trying to understand (see Dilla 1997; Lara 1997 and Nun 1997).

Measured by the quality of the information gathered, the solidity of the theoretical foundation of the researchers involved, the reviews received by the research results produced, and the outputs generated, these three projects produced relevant research results. However, measured by the actual and concrete effects produced by these projects on the political and policy making processes that they were trying to study, their impact was not correlated with their relevancy. The relationship between impact and relevancy is explored in each one of the cases under consideration.

The Argentinean Case

The Argentinean project was able to make explicit what is now widely considered the main structural obstacle faced by the process of transition to democracy in Argentina: the presence of corporatist structures of political representation that are relatively immune to popular electoral results and pressures. This was no insignificant achievement in a moment when political euphoria had marked social science analysis with a sense of triumphalism and excessive optimism in regard to the possibilities for the consolidation of democracy in Argentina. José Nun explains: "As far as I know, we were the first to argue that it was necessary to study the Argentinean transition from a double perspective: as a process of political change affecting the Régimen Político de Gobierno; and as a process of economic change affecting the Régimen Social de Acumulación (please see section I of this report). In other words, we argue that the Argentinean transition was in fact, two transitions with two different rhythms and logic" (Nun, 1997). According to the researchers involved in this project, the consolidation of

1st to see
5th
new subject

democracy required fundamental changes in the nature of the relationship between the political and the economic structures of Argentinean society. The conceptual and analytical contribution of this project was very important in a time when democracy and democratization were perceived as a simple transformation of the political structures and processes whereby society elects governments and political representatives. The project, however, did not stop at identifying the contradictory relationship between the corporate nature of state-society relations and democratic electoral politics and processes in Argentina. It also offered specific recommendations in terms of what to do to break the control that corporatist interests have maintained within the Argentinean state since the 1930's. It proposed a specific form of political behaviour for governments interested in promoting and consolidating democracy. This general recommendation was broken down into specific forms of political and policy advice, as demonstrated by the project research reports.²

The relevancy of the social knowledge generated by this project is beyond doubt. The reports produced by the project have been widely praised in intellectual circles, not only in Argentina, but throughout Latin America. However, the impact achieved by this research project can only be established by taking into consideration the relationship between knowledge, politics and power that we discussed in our general review of the relationship between relevancy and impact.

The Argentinean project introduced a fundamental new dimension to the way in which democracy and democratic transitions were discussed in Argentinean society in the mid 1980s. José Nun explains:

The main impact of this project... was to reorganize the conceptual and analytical points of reference that were being used in Argentina and other Latin American countries to discuss democratic transitions (Nun, 1997).

This form of impact can be established by the level of attention that the results of this project received in academic, political and media circles. The work of Hector Maceira and Oscar Grillo (La Concertación Social en las Provincias de Córdoba y de Río Negro. Buenos Aires: CLADES,

²A brief summary of these concrete recommendations is offered in Nun 1997.

1989) generated heated discussions in the provinces of Córdoba and Rio Negro. This work proposed the creation of regional consensuses as a way of breaking the impasse that resulted from the inability of the Argentinean government to articulate a national consensus around the relationship between the state, the economy and society. The impact was more significant in the province of Rio Negro where the government of the province organized a series of workshops to analyze the conclusions and recommendations of this work as well as its provincial and regional implications.

The academic importance of this project's analysis is seen in its dissemination and distribution not only in Argentina but also throughout the Latin American region (see Julio Cotler, Sectores Populares en Argentina. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos). The work of Mario Lattuada and Oscar Grillo quickly became text books and works of reference in several university courses. The book El Gobierno de Alfonsín y las Corporaciones Agrarias, by José Nun and Mario Lattuada has been reviewed and commented in newspapers and important journals such as Revista Realidad Económica. The analysis at the centre of this book regarding the failure of PRONAGRO generated an important debate in which researchers and policy makers involved in this case had an opportunity to argue and discuss general and specific dimensions of the policy making process within the Argentinean government. Moreover, the different chapters of the book are currently used as "case studies" in different courses, seminars and graduate public policy programs conducted in Argentina by people like Oscar Ozslak, Jorge Schvarzer and Carlos Acuna. Moreover, the article by Mario Lattuada has become an obligatory point of reference to study the process of economic policy making during the Alfonsín government.³ In a recent meeting in Central America, I was able to find that the basic conceptual approach articulated by Nun is being used (with necessary variations) to study the obstacles to democratic consolidation in Central America.

Did the knowledge produced by this research project influence the way in which policies are formulated and implemented in Argentina? The short answer to this question is no. Social

³ For a more specific explanation of the practical and policy implications of the different components of this project see Q p. 4-5.

knowledge is only one among many variables that explain the behaviour of governments and social institutions. Interest and power - and this was the very lesson at the foundation of the PPP experimental activity - shape the priorities and functions of the state, governments and political institutions. The research results produced by the Argentinean team became, as soon as they were released, part of the arsenal of ideas and arguments that have shaped the recent political evolution of Argentina. They have been widely used to identify obstacles on the way to democratic consolidation; they form part of the electoral platforms of political parties, and certainly they form part of the intellectual capital of Argentinean society. However, public policies are expressions and manifestations of the balance of political power at a particular point in time.

The arrival of Carlos Menen in 1989 to the presidency of Argentina represented a radical shift in the direction of the democratic transition of this country. The actual and potential policy recommendations generated by the project were incompatible with neo-liberal ideology of the Menen government. However, while the potential **policy impact** of this project was significantly reduced by the political transformation of Argentina after the government of Raul Alfonsín, the **relevancy** of its research results continue to be significant as demonstrated by the ongoing use of the analytical structure and conceptual framework produced by this initiative.

The Costa Rican Case

The central objective of this project was the development of social strategies within which the housing fronts of Costa Rica could successfully confront and hopefully defeat the neo-liberal agenda of the Costa Rican governments in the late 1980's. To achieve this purpose, the researchers combined theoretical analysis with practical forms of political intervention. The theoretical dimension of this project is reflected in the attempt by researchers to make explicit the nature of state policy objectives and the contradictions between these policies and the interest of the popular sectors of Costa Rican society. At the practical and political level, researchers attempted to induce social movements to resolve these contradictions by politically confronting, and hopefully defeating the neo-liberal agenda of the government. This was done

"through informal and close relations between researchers and the leaders of these committees" (Lara, 1997). CEPAS' activism has to be placed and understood within the political context of Central America in the 1980s. Silvia Lara explains:

Until 1987/1988 we believed that popular organizations would end up producing a strong political crisis in response to the process of structural adjustments implemented by the Costa Rican government. This crisis would have been congruent with the revolutionary conditions of Central America during the 1980's (Lara, 1997).

In these circumstances, the work of CEPAS was oriented towards the generation of practical knowledge that community organizations could use in their political efforts. This emphasis on the practical dimension of social science research explains the limited efforts to publish, diffuse and discuss the explanations of social reality generated by the project.

There can be no doubt that the theoretical dimension of this project is relevant in terms of its conceptualization of the nature of the government agenda, the nature of popular sectors of Costa Rica and the contradictions between the two. There is very little doubt, either, that the active participation of researchers in the political process at the community level in the barrios where the research project took place had a positive effect on the development of the organizational capacity of the housing fronts. Did the relevancy of the project translate into political capacity to change the policy orientation of the Costa Rican government according to the original objectives of the project? The short answer to this question is: No. At least, the intended effects of the researchers never materialized. As the researchers themselves explain:

It was clear that for these organizations, participation was not conceived as a politically formative or (re)-educational experience. "Raising people's political consciousness' or changing the system was not of interest to them, although it was of interest to the housing fronts who may have worked with them. In fact, our interviews indicated that participants (other than the odd militant in a left-wing party) did not see any correlation between the real problems they faced and the prevailing social order. Rather, poverty was seen as a phenomenon which was as natural as rain or sun --nothing could be done to change it or avoid it --and social differences were seen as a product of the natural order of things in dichotomous opposites: good/bad, above/below, poor/rich. Their struggle, therefore, was not against the status quo but rather against exclusion; they demanded to be included in the status quo by pressuring government institutions. Participation, rather than being an objective, was a necessity which became a decisive factor under specific

evidence?

I think it's of housing?

circumstances (Lara, 1997).

Does this mean that the result of this project had no impact whatsoever? No. Like in the Argentinean case, the research results, and the participatory approach used by researchers, contributed to the development of organized social strategies that were relatively successful in terms of their capacity to shape and condition housing policies in Costa Rica. That the results of the researchers' efforts did not match their original intentions does not mean that their effort was irrelevant. Once again, public policies are not determined by good research results. They are the result of political struggle and competition. Moreover, the rationale guided by the social actors that participate in the processes of policy making and implementation are complex. In this case, the ultimate political objectives of the housing fronts changed over the course of several years of struggle. What began as a protest against the status quo, became an effort to participate in the status quo.

From this perspective, the project achieved an unintended result: the incorporation of the community organizations in the policy making process of government. This result was significantly different from the original motivation of researchers who were trying to promote a discussion about the nature of the regime itself rather than a discussion within the regime.

According to Silvia Lara:

We propose that the results and impact of this project be established within the framework of complex political projects and processes. Many forces operate within these frameworks. This project was only one of them. There is no doubt that the efforts of the housing committees, NGOs and other organizations involved in the struggle for housing forced the government to redefine its housing policies (Lara, 1997).

There is no doubt that the emergence of neo-liberal economic and social policies that became dominant in Latin America by the end of the 1980's had a direct impact on the possibilities for this project to achieve a more significant impact on the political and policy process that it studied. The institutionalization of neo-liberal thinking and the decline of revolutionary politics throughout Latin America significantly reduced the possibilities for popular organizations to force governments to change the rules that govern the political and policy making processes of

Latin American societies.

The outputs of this projects were limited. Silvia Lara identifies the following:

- a) A research report: Eugenia Molina. Participación y Democracia Popular en los Comités de Lucha por Vivienda en Costa Rica. San José: Centro de Estudios para la Acción Social, 1991.
- b) A chapter in a book: Silvia Lara and Eugenia Molina. "Participation and Development in Cuban Municipalities". In Michael Kaufman and Haroldo Dilla Alfonso, Community Power and Grassroots Democracy. Zed Books and IDRC, 1997; and,
- c) Two presentations to participants of the "Summer Institute" organized by the IDRC in San José, in 1992 and 1993.

According to Silvia Lara the limited written outputs of this project has to do with the institutional culture and objectives of CEPAS. As we indicated before, this research institution was predominantly concerned with the development of information and analysis that the housing committees could use to enhance their political power.

The Cuban Case

The Cuban case offers important lessons about the relationship between relevancy and impact within the context of a revolutionary regime. Once again, this research project was conducted according to rigorous research and intellectual standards. The project managed to identify several crucial tensions and contradictions between the objective of participation, as stated in the formal objectives of the Cuban government, and the centralized, vertical and paternalistic structures of political participation that takes place at the level of municipal government in Cuba. From the identification of these contradictions, the researchers were able to propose specific measures oriented toward the closing of the gap between the official democratic objectives of the revolution and the actual decision-making process at the local level.

It is important to understand the national context within which this project was designed and organized. Haroldo Dilla explains how between 1986 and 1989, Cuba lived a period of relative political tolerance and flexibility. This period culminated with the IV Congress of the

Partido Comunista Cubano and the constitutional reform of 1992. During this period, academics and intellectuals were able to participate and influence the discussion about the nature of the Cuban revolutionary process and its future. The Centro de Estudios sobre América or Centre for Studies on the Americas (CEA) emerged during this period as Cuba's most important and most independent research centre. The intellectual calibre of its members and the international linkages developed by CEA provided the organization with an important level of academic freedom and legitimacy.⁴ In these conditions, the researchers in charge of the Cuban PPP project tried to achieve both relevancy and impact. That is, they tried to articulate adequate explanations of the nature of local governments in Cuba and the same time they tried to influence the very structure and functioning of local state structures.

The outputs of this project are impressive:

One book: Haroldo Dilla and Gerardo González. Participación Popular y Desarrollo en los Municipios Cubanos. La Habana: Centro de Estudios sobre América y Editora Política, 1993. Three thousand copies of this book were sold and distributed. A second edition of this book was published in Caracas, Venezuela by Editorial Tropykos.

Chapters: Articles by Haroldo Dilla and Gerardo González appeared in La Democracia en Cuba y el Diferendo con Estados Unidos; La Participación Popular en Cuba y los Retos del Futuro; y Communitary Development and Grassroots Participation, published by IDRC and Zed Books.

Eight articles in academic journals (see Dilla, 1997).

One national workshop and six local workshops to discuss the project's result with a total participation of 228 people.

19 presentations made by the project's researchers in national events.

Presentations in several Canadian, American, Latin American and European universities including York University, Harvard University, Stanford, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México y Complutense de Madrid.

⁴Haroldo Dilla points out in his report that the contact with IDRC was the one that opened for CEA the door of international research assistance.] ✓

In the political and policy arena: Four reports presented to the National Parliament, a report to a special commission in charge of formulating a new electoral law, and reports to a special commission in charge of reorganizing the municipal government system of Cuba. In this case, the CEA research team directed a team of advisors to collaborate with the National Parliament.

CEA was intervened and closed in March of 1996, only months after the researchers in charge of this project had received an invitation to form part of a national commission to elaborate a new Municipal Law.

The political context of Cuba had begun to change after 1993. Innumerable tensions and contradictions generated by the economic crisis of Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union manifested themselves in the organization of different groups with different positions about the future of the Revolution. CEA sided with the most politically flexible and pragmatic groups. In the end, this position became vulnerable to the pressures of the most conservative sectors of the Cuban political and bureaucratic class.

In his answer to the questionnaire that we used in this activity, Haroldo Dilla vividly explains the tensions involved in the definition of the project objectives and in the articulation and presentation of its results. It shows the pressures suffered by the researchers and the entire institution of CEA to modify the research project in order for its objectives and results to accommodate the political needs of the most conservative sectors of the Cuban dominant class. It is in this conjuncture described by Dilla that a researcher or a research institution can choose between relevancy and impact. If the researchers at CEA had chosen to privilege impact over relevancy, they could have accommodated the research project, its methodology, objectives and results to fit the needs and desires of the dominant forces within the system. Indeed, they may well have seen their analysis reflected in government resolutions, policy normative frameworks, legislations and other concrete measures of impact. Instead, they decided to press for research relevancy without abandoning the hope for research impact. Unfortunately, political conditions in Cuba turned against them, and as a result, the potential impact of the project was lost. CEA itself was politically intervened and disbanded. Does this mean that the project had no impact whatsoever?

According to Haroldo Dilla, the impact of this project must be assessed within a context

wider than the one that prevails in Cuba today. In other words, the impact of this project must be assessed in terms of a) its contribution to the historical record of a social experience that was examined and studied in a rigorous way; and b) its contribution to the intense debate that is taking place in Cuba today and that is oriented towards the definition of a basic social consensus about the future of the Revolution.

IV. RELEVANCY, IMPACT AND POWER: LESSONS ABOUT RESEARCH AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The nature and consequences of social science research cannot be understood in isolation from the framework of power relations within which researchers identify research issues, research objectives and methodologies. Power and politics condition the research process from beginning to end. Research also condition the very power relations within which it takes place. Here it is important to remember the basic premise of this analysis: the main purpose of social theory is to make social reality explicit. By making social reality explicit, social theory has the capacity to shape the same reality that it is trying to explain. We can articulate this in terms that are more relevant to our discussion: the purpose of social theory is to make power relations explicit (for example, by analyzing the political dimension of public policy making; or, by analyzing the content and impact of public policies). By making power relations explicit (identifying public policy consequences, winners and losers, for example), social theory has the potential capacity to reproduce or alter power relations.

The moment we include power as a variable in our discussion of social science research relevancy and impact, we are forced to confront the fact that researchers are components of the very power structures that they study. Therefore, researchers are political beings, in the sense that they have a position, most of the time an informed position, vis-à-vis the power structures within which they operate. For this reason, the old idea of social scientists operating from neutral and objective positions has been practically discarded from current conceptualizations of the role and nature of social sciences.

This takes us again to the problem of relevancy and impact. Researchers want not simply

to explain the world, but to have an impact on it. Impact, however, can be achieved in different forms, with different degrees of visibility, and within different time frameworks. Researchers' decision about the kind and the nature of impact that they want to achieve depends, very often, on their individual perception of the power relations and social reality that they are trying to explain and change. For example, most researchers supported by the IDRC in Chile during the Pinochet Regime had the intellectual capacity and the skills to produce research and research results that could have had an impact on the new policies formulated and implemented by the military government. Most of them, however, decided not to pursue this avenue. They opted for relevancy and critical knowledge, at the expense of impact. Thanks to that courageous decision, Chile has today the intellectual resources to promote and consolidate a more humane and decent political system.

The group of intellectuals and economists, popularly known as the Chicago Boys, found themselves in a completely different position. They were in basic agreement with the new power relations established by the Pinochet regime, and for that reason they were able to produce research results that had a direct, material impact on social relations in Chile.

The three case studies under review further illustrate these points. In the Argentinean case, the researchers were concerned with relevancy and impact. Impact, however, was not the independent variable in their decision to formulate and organize this project. The critical approach adopted by the Argentinean researchers responded to their view of social reality and undoubtedly their values as well. The adoption of a critical approach, however, does not mean that they were uninterested in shaping the nature of the social reality that they were trying to explain. As a matter of fact, they adopted a critical position of support to the process of democratic transition in Argentina. Democracy, however, is not something that societies arrive at. It is a process of social construction. The Argentina researchers perceived themselves as active participants in this process. Their analysis and recommendations were oriented toward the improvement and consolidation of the democratic process.

The consolidation of neo-liberal policies and governments throughout Latin America in general and in Argentina in particular widened the gap between the project's recommendations and the objectives and modus operandi of the Menen regime. In other words, the consolidation

of a neo-liberal perspective on the role of the state and on the nature of public policies changed the balance between relevancy and potential impact originally built into the design, organization, implementation and expectations of this project.

In the case of Costa Rica, the researchers were also interested in both *relevancy and impact*. They wanted to contribute to the development of communities' capacity to shape policy decisions within the complex decision making process of a country undergoing a radical transition. In the mid-80's the outcome of this transition was unpredictable. Revolutionary ideologies and movements were still strong throughout Latin America. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War dramatically changed the possibilities for revolutionary change in Latin America and the Third World. This profound contextual change, had direct implications on the possibilities for popular organizations to change the nature of the social, political and economic structures within which they operate; it also had a direct impact on the possibilities for practical and progressive research like the one conducted by the Costa Rican team, to have an impact on the nature of social reality.

In the case of Cuba the options were simple. The Cuban system offered a vehicle to synchronize research activities with policy making: this vehicle is clear, it is official and it is well rewarded. What happens, however, when researchers believe that the relevancy of their work is compromised by the offer of impact, safety and benefits? In this particular case, the researchers' answer was unambiguous: they tried to the best of their ability to change the system without compromising their basic intellectual honesty. When they could not do it, they opted for relevancy, and consequently, for less direct impact and visibility.

It is important to notice, however, that the original design and organization of this project responded to an explicit desire on the part of researchers and CEA to shape the policy making process within government. As explained above, the national context within which the project originated provided researchers with an unique opportunity to participate in the political decision making process of the country. These conditions changed with the intensification of the economic and political crisis of Cuba and the increasing hostility of the United States over the last five years.

To summarize this section, discussions about impact and relevancy must take into

consideration the fact that research takes place within structures of power relations. The fact that social theory and social research has the capacity not simply to explain but also to affect these power structures makes it essential for institutions like the IDRC to understand that researchers have some degree of social and moral responsibility in regard to the relationship between their intellectual work and the power structures that they analyze. Research can be used to reproduce and legitimize; or criticize and change the nature of these structures. Researchers' personal position vis-à-vis the social context within which they operate condition the balance between impact and relevancy that each project builds in its original design.

V. GLOBALIZATION, POWER STRUCTURES AND RESEARCH

The discussion about power and research in section III of this report permits an understanding of the different intellectual and research traditions that exist in North America and Latin America. Social science research in North America is essentially pragmatic.

The assumptions that guide the pragmatic philosophical approach to social science research cannot be used in Latin America, a region where the context (that is, the power structure within which researchers operate), is still undefined, and often illegitimate. This explains the tendency for social science research in Latin America to deal with abstract and historical issues.

This is not to say that pragmatism has not influenced the evolution of social science in Latin America. As a matter of fact, it is possible to argue that pragmatism is rapidly becoming the most influential approach to social science research in the region. This, however, is not the result of domestic conditions. Nowhere in Latin America can researchers assume that the basic nature of the system and the fundamental operation of power relations are stable and legitimate. Where, then does pragmatism come from in Latin America?

To answer this question one has to take into consideration that the national power structures that we have discussed so far in this report are being increasingly conditioned by global forces. This is to say, national power structures operate within global power relations that

condition and influence domestic processes, including policy processes, political processes, economic processes and **research processes**.

The increasing predominance of global structures is precisely the phenomenon captured by the concept of globalization. This phenomenon must be taken into consideration to make sense of the complex relationship between research and power and between relevancy and impact in the modern world.

The concept of globalization refers to "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa" (Giddens, 1990, 64). While the origins of globalization can be traced to the emergence of Britain as the world leader in finance and trade during the second half of the nineteenth century, the first institutional expressions and the mechanisms of the globalized economy were set in place only after the end of the Second World War with the birth of an international monetary system at the Bretton Woods conference in July, 1944 (Mitchell, 1992, 176). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) were created on the basis of this agreement. The collapse of the Soviet Union and of socialism as a viable alternative to capitalism provided an additional stimulus to the globalization process that today dominates the way in which national economies are designed, organized and managed.

Two of the most important expressions of economic globalization are capital mobility and the transnationalization of the state apparatus. Capital mobility reduces the capacity of the state to "domesticate" national economic forces. The transnationalization of the state apparatus compels national public administration systems to play an intermediary role between increasingly powerful global forces and active, but frequently ineffective, domestic pressures and demands (see Simeon, 1991, 50; see also Ventriss, 1989, 1991). These two processes create tensions and contradictions between the liberal concept of the democratic state, with its emphasis on domestic "responsiveness" and "accountability," and the economic imperatives of the global market. The result of all this is a crisis of authority arising from the state's increasing inability to respond to the needs and demands of national populations (see Rosenau, 1992).

In Latin America, with its history of state dependency and fragile structures of

citizenship rights, globalization tends to exacerbate the capacity for the state to act independently from society. The result of this tendency is the development in many countries of the region of a wider gap between governments and the people. This tendency became painfully evident during the stabilization and adjustment crises of the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, many Latin American governments negotiated with the IMF and the World Bank to obtain new credits to restore an external balance. In securing new credits from these international organizations, Latin American countries agreed to introduce a number of economic, political, and institutional reforms along marked neo-liberal lines. The implementation of these reforms involved opening national economies to international competition, reducing the size of the state, reducing government services (eg. health, and education), and privatization. It is well known that the social costs of economic reform have been dramatic. During the 1980s, the levels of poverty in Latin America increased from 35% to 41%. Despite a slight recovery from 41% to 39% between 1990 and 1994, more than 200 million people live in conditions of poverty in Latin America today. This means that "one out of every six households in Latin America is still unable to satisfy its nutritional needs, even assuming it spent all its meagre resources entirely on food" (ECLAC, 1997, 19).

Neo-liberal economic reforms should not be treated as a temporary phenomenon but as a historical transition to a new model of development in which the market plays a decisive role in the organization of economic and social affairs. Therefore, the "lost decade" of the 1980's represented a transition period to a new model of state-society relations conditioned by the requirements of the global market (see CEPAL, 1990, 24). Needless to say, the implications of this model for the future of democratic representation in the region are profound.

Current processes of economic and political reform in Latin America create profound tensions and contradictions between the institutionalization of neo-liberal economies that are **exclusive** and democratic political systems that are **inclusive** (Calderón and Dos Santos, 1991, 19-20). These tensions and contradictions are the result of the limited capacity that political parties and electoral processes have to influence the normative framework within which public policies, and especially economic policies, are formulated and implemented in the countries of the region. Very often, this normative framework is imposed by international organizations upon

national states without taking into consideration the needs and demands of the voters.

The power of global forces and normative frameworks that condition domestic processes has a direct impact on the research processes and activities that the IDRC supports in Latin America and the Third World. By conditioning the role of the state and power relations at the national level, the phenomenon of globalization limits and conditions the policy agenda of governments and their priorities. In turn, this has a direct effect on the research agenda and priorities of researchers and research institutions as well as on the whole issue of research impact and research relevancy discussed in previous sections.

By imposing global and relatively homogenous normative frameworks on the policy making process of these countries, these organizations shape the priorities of governments as well as the basic criteria that they use to identify the kind of social knowledge and research activities that they need. A good example of this can be found in the field of research about poverty, exclusion, and social policy in Latin America today. Most social policies in Latin America are formulated within a normative framework created and disseminated by the organizations of the so called Washington consensus.

Most research on social policy is also organized within the parameters of neo-liberal social theory. In other words, the power of global organizations is reproduced by state institutions at the national level and expressed in the creation of research agendas and priorities within which social knowledge about poverty, exclusion and social policy is produced. This has direct implications on research impact and its relevancy. In an ideal sense, researchers that are exclusively concerned with impact know that their chances of success are determined by their capacity to synchronize their work with the assumptions and premises that sustain neo-liberal visions of society. On the other hand, researchers that are concerned with relevancy will have to face the increasingly limited space that global integration is leaving for non conventional social science policy research.

The three projects that we have reviewed as part of this consultancy were directly affected by the emergence of neo-liberal ideology and policies throughout the world. Neo-liberalism has created a new political and policy framework that determines the possibilities for research to have concrete and visible policy implications. Researchers have to decide whether or

not to accept this framework. Often it is assumed that researchers who opt to work outside the limits of established political and policy frameworks do so because they are unable to deal "with the real world" or because they can not be "practical" and "concrete." Many half humorous and perhaps unfair images of Latin American social scientists express these assumptions. However, this representation of critical social scientists is a misconception. Often researchers opt out of the instrumental study of reality simply because it is essential (as the history of political and social thought in the Western World has shown) that reality and "the real world" is studied from different levels of analysis and from different political and theoretical perspectives. By moving away from the practical and the immediate, researchers might be sacrificing direct, immediate and concrete forms of impact. However, they might be trying to achieve relevancy which is another way of explaining and impacting on reality.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IDRC:

The above discussion has direct implications for IDRC's attempt to "extend its understanding of the influence its development research activities have had over the past 25 years."

First, we identified and analyzed the two fundamental functions and objectives of social science research: to **explain** and **change** the nature of social reality. This distinction allowed us to establish the value and implications of social science research in terms of **relevancy** and **impact**.

Relevancy we argued is a function of the intellectual and scientific capacity of researchers. Therefore, it is a dimension of social science research that the IDRC can manage and even control by carefully considering the research and intellectual record of the researchers with whom it discusses and negotiates projects. **Relevancy** is relatively easy to assess and evaluate. Peer review and publications are some of the most widely used methods of establishing the intellectual value of social science research results.

Impact, is a more complex issue to predict and evaluate. The potential research impact

of a social science project is certainly affected by the scientific merit of its design, methodology, arguments, analysis and conclusions. However, the quality of research results is not the only, nor the most important criteria to determine the potential impact of social science research projects. The social structures and processes that social science knowledge tries to affect are power structures. Power, then, is a key variable in determining the possibilities for research to have an effect on the nature of social reality. This is particularly important for policy-oriented social science research, where the state is in many ways the target of research projects' attempt to change reality.

Different power structures, different ideologies and forms of government produce different frameworks of political and policy limitations and possibilities. Researchers always confront the need to decide their position vis-à-vis these political and policy frameworks. These are moral, ethical and political decisions. They involve an element of **personal and social responsibility**.

Globalization and the increasing power of financial transnational organizations have generated the conditions for the establishment of global frameworks of political and policy possibilities and limitations that affect the role of governments, reducing the space for political action and certainly, affecting the role and nature of social science research. More and more, the normative frameworks generated by transnational financial organizations condition the role of the state and the research agenda of Latin American countries. Most researchers interviewed by this consultant over the last three years would say that it is becoming increasingly difficult to do research outside the very limited framework established by the neo-liberal agenda of governments.⁵

In this sense it is important to establish a trend identified by researchers throughout the region: the tendency for social science researchers to work as government consultants, very often

⁵This has serious implications for the development of relevant social science knowledge in the different countries of the region. While globalization generates homogeneous economic and to some extent political trends, it does not generate a homogeneous impact on the social conditions of different societies. Therefore, the promotion of nationally relevant social science research continues to be essential.

*above with
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with the support of transnational financial organizations. The implications of this trend can be dramatic. Research was always conditioned by the agenda and priorities of donor agencies. However, at least in the experience of the IDRC, researchers were always given ample opportunities to identify their research problems and issues according to their own perception of their national and regional priorities, needs and demands. The IDRC also provided researchers, through extensive and permanent process of consultations, with the opportunity to shape the IDRC's internal agenda. Most researchers argue that this is changing and that a more congruent relationship between financial transnational agencies, donor agencies and governments is emerging. The result of this is the reduction of the freedom for researchers to question established government practices and policies. This has certainly created a more instrumental and pragmatic research agenda throughout the continent.

While this agenda might increase the **policy impact** of social science research, it does nothing to secure its **relevancy**. Relevancy depends on the authenticity and the historical and social significance of social science research. The social science research supported by the IDRC in the Southern Cone during the 1970s had no possibility of achieving policy impact within the political framework imposed by military regimes. The same can be said about the support provided by the Centre to social scientists in South Africa during Apartheid. Despite the limitations imposed by political conditions on the potential impact of social science research results, the IDRC continued to fund social science research simply because accepting the framework of the possible was morally unacceptable.

An argument can be made suggesting that the constraints of military regimes or Apartheid do no exist in Latin America today and that democracy offers a basic point of reference and a framework within which social scientist can work within the system to improve the system. This view, however, does not consider the complexity of democratic processes in Latin America today. As we discussed before, democracy is not a state that societies arrived at. Rather, it is a process filled with conflict, tensions and contradictions. One of the fundamental roles that social science play is the elucidation of these conflicts, tensions and contradictions. By making social reality explicit, social science creates opportunities for the constructions of a democratic social consensuses about the nature and organization of social, political and

economic life.

The IDRC's search for new ways of assessing social science research impact cannot avoid confronting the issue of politics, power and social responsibility. It can not avoid maintaining the necessary boundaries between consultancy and research; it cannot avoid assuming the risks that the production of relevant knowledge always involves; and it cannot avoid promoting a pluralist and democratic intellectual climate in Latin America, precisely at a time when these societies are trying to overcome their authoritarian and vertical past.

PROJECT SUMMARIES

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND PUBLIC POLICY IN ARGENTINA

3-P-87-0313

RECIPIENT INSTITUTION:

Centro Latinoamericano para el Analisis de la Democracia (CLADE). Buenos Aires, Argentina.

IDRC FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION:

CAD\$ 82,720.00 (18 MONTHS)

OUTPUTS:

Several Research Reports distributed by CLADE in Argentina by Oscar Grillo, Hector Maceira, Jose Nun and Mario Lattuada. The final versions of these reports were published in the form of a book: Jose Nun and Mario Lattuada, El Gobierno de Alfonsin y las Corporaciones Agrarias. Buenos Aires: Manantial, 1991. Sections of this book were included in Julio Cotler, Sectores Populares en Argentina. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1995.

The book by Nun and Lattuada has been reviewed and commented in newspapers and important journals such as Revista Realidad Economica. Sections of the book are currently used in graduate public policy courses taught by people such as Oscar Ozslak, Jorge Schvarzer and Carlos Acuna.

PROJECT REACH:

El libro El Gobierno de Alfonsin y las Corporaciones Agrarias by Jose Nun and Mario Lattuada was read by President Alfonsin himself and by his Secretary of Agriculture Lucio Rea. The analysis of PRONAGRO generated an important debate in which researchers and policy makers involved in this case had an opportunity to argue and discuss general and specific dimensions of the policy making process within the Argentinean government. The same kind of response was generated by the analysis of the political dimension of industrial policy and in the

development of the pharmaceutical industry written by Mario Lattuada and Oscar Grillo. The work of Hector Maceira and Oscar Grillo (La Concertacion Social en las Provincias de Cordoba y de Rio Negro. Buenos Aires: CLADES, 1989) generated heated discussions in the provinces of Cordoba and Rio Negro. This work proposed the creation regional consensuses as a way of breaking the impasse reached in Argentina as a result of the inability for the national government to articulate some basic form of national consensus about the relationship between the state, the economy and society. The impact was more significant in the province of Rio Negro where the government of the province organized a series of workshops to analyze the conclusions and recommendations of this work as well as its provincial and regional implications. Other organizations reached by this project are: The Sociedad Rural Argentina, the Federacion Agraria Argentina, The Confederaciones Rurales Argentinas, the Confederacion Intercorporativa Agropecuaria, the Union Industrial Argentina, the Consejo Argentino de la Industria, the Confereracion General de la Industria, the Programa Nacional Agropecuario, la Comision de Concertacion Politica Lechera and the Fondo de Promocion de la Actividad Lechera.

Academically, the analysis produced was reproduced not only in Argentina but also throughout the Latin American region (see Julio Cotler, Sectores Populares en Argentina. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos). The book El Gobierno de Alfonsin y las Corporaciones Agrarias, by Jose Nun and Mario Lattuada has been reviewed and commented in newspapers and important journals such as Revista Realidad Economica. In a recent meeting in Central America, I was able to find that the basic conceptual approach articulated by Nun is being used (with necessary variations) to study the obstacles to democratic consolidation in Central America.

The sections of the book by Pepe Nun and Mario Lattuada have been widely used as "case studies" in different courses, seminars and graduate public policy programs conducted in Argentina by people like Oscar Ozslak, Jorge Schvarzer and Carlos Acuna. Moreover, the article by Mario Lattuada has become an obligatory point of reference to study the process of economic policy making during the Alfonsin government. The work of Mario Lattuada and Oscar Grillo

quickly became text books and works of reference in several university courses.

PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC POLICY IN COSTA RICA**3-P-87-1053****RECIPIENT INSTITUTION:**

Centro de Estudios para la Accion Social (CEPAS)

IDRC FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION:

CAD\$ 26,068 (This does not include Coordination Costs)

OUTPUTS:

- a) A research report: Eugenia Molina. Participación y Democracia Popular en los Comités de Lucha por Vivienda en Costa Rica. San José: Centro de Estudios para la Acción Social, 1991.
- b) A chapter in a book: Silvia Lara and Eugenia Molina. "Participation and Development in Cuban Municipalities". In Michael Kaufman and Haroldo Dilla Alfonso, Community Power and Grassroots Democracy. Zed Books and IDRC, 1997; and,
- c) Two presentations to participants of the "Summer Institute" organized by the IDRC in San José, in 1992 and 1993.

PROJECT REACH:

Community organizations in La Guarari (600 families); Barrio Carmen Lyra (600 families); Barrio Oscar Felipe (300 families); and, El Nazareno (100 families).

PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN CUBA**3-P-87-01053****RECIPIENT INSTITUTION:**

Centro de Estudios de las Americas (CEA).

IDRC CONTRIBUTION:

CAD \$ 45, 220. 00 (This amount does not include Coordination Costs).

OUTPUTS:

One book: Haroldo Dilla and Gerardo González. Participación Popular y Desarrollo en los Municipios Cubanos. La Habana: Centro de Estudios sobre América y Editora Política, 1993. Three thousand copies of this book were sold and distributed. A second edition of this book was published in Caracas, Venezuela by Editorial Tropykos.

Chapters in books: Articles by Haroldo Dilla and Gerardo González appeared in La Democracia en Cuba y el Diferendo con Estados Unidos; La Participación Popular en Cuba y los Retos del Futuro; y Communitary Development and Grassroots Participation, published by IDRC and Zed Books.

Eight articles in academic journals (see Dilla, 1997).

One national workshop and six local workshops to discuss the project's result with a total participation of 228 people.

19 presentations made by the project's researchers in national events.

Presentations in several Canadian, American, Latin American and European universities including York University, Harvard University, Stanford, Universidad de Puerto Rico,

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México y Complutense de Madrid.

In the political and policy arena: Four reports presented to the National Parliament, a report to a special commission in charge of formulating a new electoral law, and reports to a special commission in charge of reorganizing the municipal government system of Cuba. In this case, the CEA research team directed a team of advisors to collaborate with the National Parliament.

PROJECT REACH:

Academics and intellectuals in Cuba, Canada, the United States, Europe and Latin America.

Policy makers and politicians in Cuba.

Community organizations in Centro Habana, Bayamo, Santa Cruz del Norte y Chambas.

**DETERMINACION DEL IMPACTO DE LA INVESTIGACION
CUESTIONARIO**

PRIMERA PARTE: LA EXPERIENCIA DEL PROYECTO:

- 1) Por favor describa la racionalidad, objetivos y estrategia operativa de este proyecto.
- 2) Identifique los productos directos e indirectos de este proyecto (libros, artículos académicos, artículos periodísticos, material educativo, conferencias, presentaciones, etc.). Por favor indique con claridad títulos, fechas y otras referencias).
- 3) Identifique y explique los factores mas importantes que incidieron en el diseño y ejecución de este proyecto.

Recursos propios
Recursos del IDRC
Condiciones socio-políticas
Condiciones institucionales
Otros

- 4) ¿Quiénes participaron en el diseño y ejecución de este proyecto?
- 5) Identifique y explique los resultados e impactos esperados de este proyecto al momento de su diseño y desarrollo. Los siguientes son algunos resultados e impactos típicos esperados:

Desarrollo institucional
Contribución a las ciencias sociales
Impacto en el proceso de formulación de políticas públicas
Impacto en en desarrollo de la capacidad política de determinados actores en los procesos de formulación de políticas públicas
Impacto en la opinión pública
Impacto en el debate político nacional
Otros

- 6) Identifique aquellos resultados e impactos que se consideraban como los más importantes durante el diseño y ejecución de este proyecto. Por favor explique su respuesta.

- 7) Por favor, identifique y explique los resultados e impactos reales de este proyecto durante su ejecución y después de su terminación. Los siguientes son algunos de los resultados e impactos típicos reales de proyectos como el estudiado:

Desarrollo institucional
Contribución a las ciencias sociales
Impacto en el proceso de formulación de políticas públicas
Impacto en el desarrollo de la capacidad política de determinados actores en los procesos de formulación de políticas públicas
Impacto en la opinión pública
Impacto en el debate político nacional
Otros

Por favor identifique y señale evidencias que apoyen su respuesta, incluyendo opiniones y puntos de vista de personas que conocen el alcance de los resultados de este proyecto.

- 8) En relación a la pregunta 7: ¿cuáles son los resultados e impactos reales más importantes derivados de este proyecto? Por favor incluya sus puntos de vista así como los puntos de vista de otras personas conocedoras de los alcances de este proyecto.
- 9) ¿Que factores condicionaron los resultados e impactos reales de este proyecto? Por favor incluya sus puntos de vista así como los puntos de vista de otras personas conocedoras de los alcances de este proyecto. Identifique factores facilitadores y factores-obstáculos.
- 10) ¿Quiénes fueron afectados positiva o negativamente por este proyecto? Por favor incluya sus puntos de vista así como los puntos de vista de otras personas conocedoras de los alcances de este proyecto.
- 11) ¿En que medida influyó el IDRC la racionalidad, los objetivos y la estrategia operativa de este proyecto? ¿Hasta que punto fueron esta racionalidad, objetivos, estrategias condicionados por las prioridades del IDRC?
- 12) ¿Que lecciones se desprenden de este proyecto que puedan ser de utilidad para mejorar: a) la calidad de la investigación en el campo de las ciencias sociales; b) el impacto de la investigación en el campo de las ciencias sociales; y c) el trabajo del IDRC como agencia de apoyo a la investigación en el campo de las ciencias sociales?

*why impacts
reales?*

SEGUNDA PARTE: CONSIDERACIONES GENERALES SOBRE EL IMPACTO DE LA INVESTIGACION EN EL CAMPO DE LAS CIENCIAS SOCIALES

- 1) La relación entre investigación teórica y aplicada en el campo de las ciencias sociales es una relación compleja. Algunos investigadores tratan de balancear estas dos dimensiones. Otros enfatizan una de ellas. En su opinión, deberían instituciones como el IDRC apoyar tanto la investigación teórica como la aplicada en el campo de las ciencias sociales? ¿Únicamente la aplicada? Por favor explique su respuesta.
- 2) Que criterios deberían utilizar instituciones como el IDRC para determinar los beneficios que se derivan de la investigación teórica?
- 3) Que criterios deberían utilizar instituciones como el IDRC para determinar los beneficios que se derivan de la investigación aplicada?
- 4) Algunos estudiosos del papel de las ciencias sociales argumentan que el papel fundamental de éstas es hacer explícita la realidad social. Al hacer la realidad social explícita, las ciencias sociales contribuyen a transformar la realidad social. En que medida se relaciona este argumento con la experiencia del proyecto_____.
- 5) Se puede argumentar que la globalización afecta el peso y la relación entre los factores domésticos y externos que condicionan los procesos de formulación de políticas públicas en América Latina. ¿En que medida afecta esto la capacidad de las ciencias sociales de la región para influenciar la acción del Estado y de las instituciones sociales?
- 6) ¿Cuál es en su opinión el papel que están jugando instituciones como el IDRC en la determinación del balance entre los factores domésticos y externos que condicionan los procesos de formulación de políticas públicas en América Latina?
- 7) Por favor caracterize el impacto general que ha tenido el apoyo de instituciones como el IDRC en el desarrollo de las ciencias sociales en América Latina/su propio país? ¿Cuáles son las grandes lecciones que pueden derivarse de esta experiencia?