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# BRIDGING RESEARCH & POLICY 2001



MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS PROGRAMME

UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme has been innovating since its inception in 1994. Intergovernmental, interdisciplinary, international, and comparative, it aims at new, more inclusive, more relevant forms of social science. It offers a bridge – which by happy coincidence is precisely what *most* means in Russian – between science, policy, and society. By the same token it helps to foster fruitful encounters between social scientists, policy-makers, and NGOs, the private sector, and local communities. Ultimately, what is at stake is to convert social change that is passively undergone into social transformations that can be actively undertaken. Social-science research is of course just one thread in a complex web. But the conviction behind the MOST Programme is that it is a vital one.

Activities under the Programme are defined by this general spirit, as well as by thematic priorities and privileged modes of action. The three priorities, which correspond to crucial contemporary issues of social transformation, are multicultural and multi-ethnic societies, urban issues, and globalization and governance. The privileged mode of action is to seek added value in the networking of existing complementary but uncoordinated projects. Networking is not just a way of making research more efficient. It also contributes to the circulation of knowledge – not least between policy communities, academic communities, and society – and to the development of capacities for future ventures. This report surveys what has been achieved, and points to what still needs to be done.

MOST Programme  
UNESCO Headquarters  
1, rue Miollis  
75732 Paris Cedex 15  
France  
Tel +33 1 45 68 37 99  
Fax +33 1 45 68 57 24  
ssmost@unesco.org

MOST ANNUAL REPORT

2001



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# MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

# foreword



**BIO NOTE: Ali KAZANCIGIL**

Ali Kazancigil, a political scientist, introduced in the early 1990s the concept of an international social science programme to UNESCO. As a result, the Management of Social Transformations Programme (MOST) was established in 1994, of which he has since been the Executive Secretary. He is also the Deputy Assistant Director-General and Director of the Division of Social Sciences, Research and Policy, in the Sector of Social and Human Sciences. Prior to this, he was the editor of UNESCO's *International Social Science Journal*, from 1984-90. Before joining UNESCO, he was a professor of political science and international relations at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. His personal research subjects are comparative politics and historical sociology, on which he has published articles and books, including *The State in Global Perspective*; *Comparing Nations: Concepts, Strategies, Substance* (with Mattei Dogan), and *Institutions and Democratic Statecraft* (with Metin Heper & Bert A. Rockman).

**CONTACT**

a.kazancigil@unesco.org

The Annual Report 2001 can be found at <http://www.unesco.org/most/annualreport2001.htm>

The *Annual Report 2001* of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme offers information on new research directions and policy recommendations, and presents the various activities of MOST concerning multicultural societies and international migrations, urban development, globalization, governance and sustainability.

MOST research and policy networks analyze the relationship between multicultural societies and international migrations, generating knowledge and policy recommendations on social cohesion and citizenship rights of migrant groups in such societies. As regards urban development and governance, emphasis is put on socially and environmentally sustainable cities, as well as the socio-economic revitalization of historic cities in coastal areas. The research work on globalization explores policies and institutional mechanisms that would render global governance more transparent and participatory, so that globalization benefits all countries and social groups, through a better equilibrium between the often contradictory pursuits of economic efficiency and redistributive justice. The added value of MOST consists of combining, within each of its networks and projects, the twin goals of fostering long-term, autonomously defined research, with providing a knowledge base for policy-making. A related feature of MOST is to promote truly international, multilateral research between social science communities from the North and the South, in which conceptualization and design are formulated between all partners, on an equal footing. In this context, scientific and institutional capacity-building is a major priority for the MOST Programme. A central issue for MOST is whether the activities have impact and influence in terms of knowledge production and policy-making. This is difficult to measure quantitatively and even more so qualitatively. Some impact, in terms of infrastructure and institution-building, developing methodological capacities, as well as the participation of MOST networks in policy-formulation and policy-evaluation can be shown, as we have tried to do in this Report.

MOST has grown rapidly, to become one of UNESCO's five major scientific programmes. The four others are on ecology, geology, hydrology and oceanography. All of them maintain close links to converge on sustainable development research and policies. We also actively participate in UN-wide interagency cooperation on social policy and development questions.

MOST works with multiple partners at national, regional and international levels. These include major universities, ministries of research and national social science research councils, social science organizations such as the ISSC, as well as CODESRIA in Africa, CLACSO and FLACSO in Latin America, AASSREC in Asia, and UN bodies such as the UNDP, UNDCP and UNU.

In 2002, MOST is undergoing an external evaluation to assess its achievements during the 1994-2001 period, and to reflect on future activities.

In a world increasingly characterized by transnationalisation, complexity and uncertainty, social sciences are more than ever necessary to identify, understand and, cope with current social transformations and future challenges. In its second phase, spanning over 2002-2009, we are confident that MOST will continue to be a useful framework of cooperation for social science and policy communities, world-wide.

Dr. Ali KAZANCIGIL  
Executive Secretary, MOST

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*Bio notes of MOST Secretariat and International Project Coordinators are interspersed throughout this issue.*

The MOST Programme is innovative in several respects. It was the first intergovernmental social science research and policy programme to be created in a UN Specialized Agency. It fosters interdisciplinary and comparative research on crucial contemporary issues, and was from its inception truly international by design, conceptual framework, methodology, and participation.

Finally, it enhances linkages between social science research and policy-making, as well as between the range of social and economic actors, including NGOs, the media, and the private sector.

The Programme operates through large regional and international networks involving researchers and users of social science (18 since 1995), as well as operational development projects to which it provides expertise and capacity-building support. MOST's commitment to collaboration and partnership is shown by its web of relations with major universities, ministries of research and national social science research councils, regional social science organizations such as CODESRIA in Africa, CLACSO and FLACSO in Latin America, and AASSREC in Asia, and UN bodies such as the UNDP, UNDCP and UNU.

Substantively, MOST comprises three themes as well as a range of cross-cutting activities.

The themes cover areas of transformation of particular contemporary concern both for social science and for policy:

- the democratic management of multicultural and multi-ethnic societies,
- urban governance and urban development strategies, and
- coping locally and nationally with global economic and environmental problems.

Each theme includes projects combining the development of academic knowledge and contributions to capacity building at the policy level, along with, in many cases, societal capacity building as well. Other activities are institutional rather than thematic. They include projects to develop capacities in the social sciences; coordination of cooperative activities within the UN system and with other international bodies, actors, and events; dissemination through the MOST Clearing House; and a general analytical effort to better understand relations between knowledge implementation and policy formulation.

**Knowledge and its relationship to action lies at the heart of the objectives and activities of the MOST Programme. Knowledge of how things change, and of how they might actively be changed. Knowledge of how change is understood by the people tangled up in it. Knowledge, indeed, about the nature and limits of knowledge itself.**

That such knowledge might be attainable is in itself an ambitious claim. When social science has tried to mimic the natural sciences the results have been unconvincing. It has not been possible to produce, at the theoretical level, the equivalent of fluid mechanics or genetics, nor, at a practical level, anything quite like the jet engine or heart transplants. There are, furthermore, strong reasons to believe that the social-science equivalent of such discoveries may be impossible even in principle. In societal issues, it is not possible to produce, at the theoretical level, the equivalent of fluid mechanics or genetics, nor, at a practical level, anything quite like the jet engine or heart transplants. Social science knowledge is of a rather different nature. Furthermore, is there any guarantee that the application of the knowledge to the design of a better society is a meaningful project in the first place? Certain strands in recent social theory have answered “no”, and policy-makers, wary of the potentially critical thrust of social science, have been quick to agree with them. The problem is sometimes dismissed rather off-handedly, but it is nonetheless a serious one. Stated in the terms relevant to the MOST Programme, the question is whether social science, social policy, and social transformations, can be neatly distinguished from each other. The suggestion here is that they can. Like all forms of scientific inquiry, social science depends on support from businesses interested in the commercial exploitation of its findings, from states and other legal authorities in search of solutions to policy problems and of legitimation for policy options, and from advocates seeking a language in which to advance their cause. Compared to the natural sciences, however, the social sciences are specific in at least two respects: one to their advantage, and one to their disadvantage.

It is to their advantage that they are, on the whole, cheap – although the cost of large-scale surveys, whether quantitative or qualitative, should not be underesti-

# Social science, social policy, and social transformations

mated. They suffer, on the other hand, from the indeterminacy of their objects of study and questions. The language of social science cannot be neatly separated from the language of society itself. The tools of social science are also, in important respects, its objects. It follows that everyone, to some extent, speaks “social science”. Common sense can challenge social science in its own terms, in ways that would make little sense for physics or chemistry. Conversely, social science, once taken up and acted upon, becomes itself a kind of common sense. A familiar finding of all research that deals with policy relevance is the difficulty of distinguishing a policy agenda from a scientific problem – which in no way diminishes the imperative necessity of doing so.

The risk, therefore, is that social science might find it difficult to free itself from the dynamic relation between social policy and social transformations. Instead of having its own agenda, and being able to contribute to that relation, social science would run the risk of merely reflecting the policy/political agenda. In turn, this would make it difficult to consider policy as having any autonomous capacity to influence social change. Things would evolve, under the pressure of structural trends in

climate, demography, technology, and so on, and policy would simply echo them.

The crucial significance of the MOST Programme is its attempt to re-open the triangle of social science, social policy, and social change. The enhanced autonomy of social science – its capacity to formulate its own questions and to develop its own criteria of relevance and excellence – can contribute directly to disentangling social change and social policy. It can make it possible for those affected by change to consider change, and their possibly unwitting role in promoting it, rather than simply being swept along by it. It allows policy-makers to consider social developments rather than simply echoing them. Such reflexivity is what might make it possible to distinguish social transformation as a collective project, from social change as a collective fate. It is what renders useful endeavours such as MOST, which aim at relating social sciences to social agency.

In Russian, MOST (**МОСТ**) means bridge  
**МОСТ**: n. 1. ARCHIT, CONSTR bridge~to cross a bridge;  
 2. (**ЗВЕНО**) FIG link~link with, tie~tie with...

Reference: The Oxford Russian Dictionary : Russian-English English-Russian (1996) by D. F. Thompson

