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Whither development studies? Reflections on its relationship with social policy

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Abstract

This paper contributes to an on-going conversation between development studies (DS) and social policy (SP) as academic fields, particularly in the UK. Drawing on Andrew Abbott's analysis of the social sciences as an evolving system of knowledge lineages (KLs) it reflects first on the status of DS, and then on its relationship with SP. Defining DS as a distinctive KL centred on critical analysis of diverse ideas and projects for advancing human wellbeing, I suggest that it has lost coherence and influence even as research into international development thrives. Indeed it is easy to envisage its gradual assimilation into other KLs, including SP. The two increasingly overlap in their analysis of the causes of relative poverty and injustice, and what can be done to address them, within countries and globally. Strengthening links between the two fields can be justified as a political project, even at the risk of some loss of plurality and plenitude across the social sciences.

Key words: Development studies, social policy, social sciences, poverty

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1 Introduction

As fields of academic specialisation within the UK and perhaps more widely, international development studies (DS) and social policy (SP) are both firmly embedded in the social sciences but transgress older disciplinary boundaries within it. They have distinct historical and geographical points of reference: SP primarily addressing "decommodification" processes in industrialised societies; DS primarily the obstacles to poverty reduction arising from the decolonisation and the marginalisation of people living in low and middle income countries.[1] Both aspire not only to explain history and policy but to influence it; both recognise universal aspects of human nature, the resilience of national institutions and rising global interconnectedness; and both balk at over-generalisation in the face of cultural diversity and institutional complexity. Without underestimating the power of path dependence in the form of academic inertia, it is interesting to reflect on how the boundary between the two is changing. At least some of the historical reasons why ID and SP emerged as distinct fields do seem to have diminished. The distinction between rich and poor countries has become more blurred through economic convergence, while Cold War labelling of countries as belonging to first, second and third worlds is disappearing. While DS increasingly addresses social problems in all countries, SP has also expanded firmly beyond its European and North American origins. Both also recognise the interconnectedness of policy relevant analysis at the national level with analysis of global systems and eco-systems.

Given what we know, and what we need to know if we are to survive and thrive as a species, there is no avoiding specialisation in the production, preservation and protection of knowledge. At the same time there is no reason to believe that the existing division of labour between disciplines and fields of study are in any sense optimal. Viewed through a quasi-market lens it is tempting to argue that demarcating academic boundaries matters less than promoting the free flow of ideas between them, as well as freedom for people to self-organise in response to new problems and opportunities as they arise: appropriating ideas and methods opportunistically and developing emergent concepts, theories and methods in response to changing sources of demand. Weighed against this are practical arguments for discipline, and formidable path dependence in the form of resilient academic traditions, entrenched vested interests, habits of thinking and patterns of funding with a powerful hold both on how we think and whose ideas prevail, not least through the ability of more established groups to appropriate and modify ideas spawned within more ephemeral social networks and movements.

This paper is informed and motivated by three sets of ideas. The first comes from a lecture delivered by Andrew Abbott entitled "The vicissitudes of methods" at the 2012 UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) social science research methods conference in Oxford. Starting with the observation that "chaos seems to prevail in the social sciences" he asks how this diminishes their collective influence, and what scope there might be for establishing clearer

[1] The focus of development studies on poverty can be contested: rival for attention over the years having been modernization, capitalism and economic growth. However, I will argue that as a distinct entity DS addressed brought to these issues a concern with the distribution of income and wealth. Further discussion of the history and definition of DS can be found in Pieterse (2001), Kothari (2005) and Sumner and Tribe (2008).

order and a stronger voice. It is easy to assume that interdisciplinary dialogue is part of the answer, and to urge us all out of our "bunkers, foxholes and silos." But is all such exchange necessarily a good thing? When is it a distraction from achieving greater specialist depth of understanding? And why do cross-disciplinary encounters often result in mutual incomprehension, or have only temporary outcomes? In short, Abbott encourages us to think harder about how we can forage, trespass, beg, steal, share and borrow more widely.[2] And to address these questions, he suggests it is first useful to clarify our understanding of how ideas in the social sciences evolve.

A second set of motivating ideas for this paper originate from the perennial debate within DS about its own identity, as reflected, for example, in proceedings of recent annual conferences of the Development Studies Association (Thomas, et al. 2009; Copestake, 2010; Fischer & Kothari, 2011; Wood & Tiwari, 2012; Gore, 2013). This provides interesting case study material for reflecting on Abbott's ideas about the evolution of the social sciences. The third set of ideas, concerns the relationship between DS and SP, and provides an interesting case study of Abbott's interest in how social scientists can borrow more effectively from each other. Here I draw particularly on my involvement in a series of conversations over the last decade between DS and SP specialists in and around the University of Bath. These were kicked off by a research project to explore the extension of SP to accommodate developing country contexts, including Esping-Anderson's idea of national welfare regimes (Gough et al., 2004). While not part of this project, I was able to observe some of its deliberations, including how it contributed to formation of the ESRC funded "wellbeing in developing countries" research group that ran from 2002 to 2007, bringing together staff with primary loyalties ranging from DS, SP, economics and psychology (Gough and McGregor, 2007). While my own role primarily focused on WeD research in Peru (Copestake, 2008) another strand of the project directly concerned itself with cross-disciplinary interaction within the group (Bevan, 2007). During this period international development staff at Bath also relocated from being part of a joint academic department with economics to being part of the Department of Social and Policy Sciences, alongside staff from SP, social work and sociology. This has provided further opportunities for reflecting on similarities and differences between DS and SP, as well as evaluating the case for strengthening links between them.[3]

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews three ways of organising ideas in the social sciences, referred to by Abbott as "canonization", "subsumption" and "colligation" into "knowledge lineages". All three have influenced the organisation of DS, but I suggest the third is the most important. Section 3 then focuses on the relationship between DS and SP. I set out a simple narrative of intellectual convergence between them based on a shared

[2] Abbott also shifts the analysis from individual strategies to social science itself. He suggests that few of us believe in a universal project of accumulation of social science knowledge: i.e. that we are progressively adding to the sum total of such knowledge in any absolute sense. But if so, are we really living up to the consequences of this view? How do we come to terms with a more plural and post-modern view of how social science understanding is reproduced and shared?

[3] For example, in September 2010 the Department hosted a two day symposium on "promoting social inclusion in South Asia: policies, pitfalls and analysis of welfare/insecurity regimes", and in April 2013 it was the venue for a joint conference of the Development Studies Association and the Social Policy Association entitled "meeting emerging global policy challenges: what can social policy and ID studies learn from each other?" One purpose of this paper is to draw together my reflections on participating in these two events.

interest in relative poverty, analysis of the excesses of capitalist commodification (in the spirit of Karl Polanyi) and support for social protection as a key public policy response. Section 4 considers the political grounds for seeking to develop this shared narrative, even if doing so might risk some loss of creativity and resilience across the social sciences more generally.

2 The Evolution of development studies

A problem confronting any attempt to organise and assess the totality of the social sciences, Abbott suggests, is the impossibly large number of criteria for that could be used to do so: credibility, rigour, realism, utility, precision, generality and falsifiability, for example. This cannot be addressed with more reading time or computer power. Rather, because there are so many possible ways of weighting different attributes of knowledge the prospect of evaluating and ordering what we know in a way that has a chance of being accepted as definitive is nil. Worse still, some attributes seem directly contradictory: large scale and small scale maps have their uses, but one map can't be both. He cites similar trade-offs between ethnography and world systems theory, metropolitan and subaltern knowledge, and between differently gendered knowledge, for example. In short, Abbott's starting point is that the very idea of universal knowledge is doomed. Even finding a way of measuring the total magnitude of what is or could be known is impossible.

The impossibility of agreeing on a definitive ordering of knowledge is not however an argument for doing nothing, nor for believing that all systems of classification are equally good. The key to understanding this, Abbott suggests, is the idea of "knowledge lineages" (KLs) that are differentiated and specialised according to focus, knowledge attributes, assumptions, methodologies and more. The idea of a KL is a scalable concept that can embrace disciplines, sub-disciplines and schools, as well as regional, national and linguistic variation within them. Labelling a body of knowledge a KL does imply some constancy in respect of subject matter, level of detail, key assumptions, methods, membership, stability, organisation, institutions, architecture and control. But Abbott leaves it open just how fluid the concept of a KLs should be, including what precisely constitutes a discipline or sub-discipline, although as a sociologist he not surprisingly emphasises the importance of their social or relational dimension - that by privileging certain ways of knowing they also favour different people, places, groups and interests.

How then do we distinguish between KLs? Abbott suggests it is useful to distinguish three active processes for doing so, which he refers to as canonization, subsumption and colligation. Canonization establishes a hierarchy of ideas on the basis of their historical genesis, starting with iconic pioneers (e.g. Marx, Weber and Durkheim in sociology), thereby also demoting others. Likewise one approach to DS would be to distinguish between seminal contributors to its emergence after the Second World War, and to supplement the list with the names of champions of subsequent schools of thought – in dependency theory, for example. However, this approach resonates rather weakly with the eclectic way the subject draws on ideas to address priority issues that are themselves fluid over time. For example, as discussed below, the ideas of Karl Polanyi have achieved greater prominence in DS only relatively recently and in the context of debate over how far reactions to sustained commodification in the last decade might be echoing similar dynamics of a hundred years or so earlier.

Subsumption is based on classificatory systems that sub-divide ideas and facts into tidier typologies and hierarchies, demoting some knowledge to being subsidiary to others, or explaining how they can be nested within each other. For example, DS can be broken down into its disciplinary components: economics, politics, sociology, and so on, plus areas of intersection between them such as political economy, along with their various sub-divisions and branches. In her research into different ways of understanding poverty and wellbeing Bevan (2007) used what she calls a "foundations of knowledge" framework to distinguish between academic perspectives on the basis of nine sets of assumptions: core domain/problematic, values/norms, ontology, epistemology, theory, research strategies/artefacts, forms of conclusion, rhetoric and praxis. Drawing on interviews with researchers involved in the WeD group she identified five influences, which she linked to social anthropology, sociology, political theory, psychology and economics. These two lists yield a five-by-nine matrix that makes explicit the assumptions underpinning different perspectives, and hence provides a basis for analysing mutual misunderstanding and comprehension.[4] Research based on a larger sample of development studies projects would doubtless yield additional disciplinary influences, including geography, history, philosophy and the natural sciences. Doing the same for other KLs (e.g. area studies, international studies and SP) could also be used to map areas of congruence and disjuncture between them. But, this takes us back to Abbott's point of departure: while insightful, such an ordering entails weighing up so many criteria that it is unlikely ever to command universal acceptance.

Abbott notes that both canonization and subsumption are prone to entrenching certain ways of generating and classifying knowledge, and to encouraging ever narrower specialisation. This can inhibit theoretical originality and methodological innovation. His third mechanism for classifying knowledge, colligation, arises out of bubbles of discovery based on iteration between interconnected sets of methods, the findings they generate and new questions that arise from them. His favoured example from sociology is the use of probability matrices to understand generational mobility, whereas in DS we might cite the recent rise of randomized control trials, linked to microfinance, cash transfers, economic psychology and behavioural economics. Abbott suggests that the KLs produced by colligation can be inductively organised into clusters of interconnected activity that are born, grow and then get stuck as interest and resources move on to exploring newer and more promising emerging constellations of facts and ways of knowing. Categorical and canonical knowledge assumes knowledge ordering is cumulative and the basis for stability, like rock strata. While they may contribute importantly to KLs as they mature (not least for teaching purposes) the idea of colligation suggests a more biological metaphor for thinking about the evolving organisation of knowledge.

[4] Also important, she suggests, are the cultural norms and practices required to move across such territory. Borrowing from Myerson (1994), she identifies four necessary personal dispositions to post-disciplinary approaches: to communicate at all (free from fear), to think in relative and comparative (rather than absolute) terms, to find creative (rather than zero-sum) ways to contest other ideas, and to be tolerant of difficult emotions. Not all contributors to ID and SP necessarily share all these attributes, but it is my experience that many do so. And while they are not alone in this (area studies, international studies, global studies, social geography spring to mind) this is probably a necessary if not a sufficient condition for convergence. Bevan is also clear that failure or unwillingness to explore intellectual assumptions is not the only a barrier to post-disciplinary or cross-research: the culture, habitus and political economy of researchers, funders and audiences also matter.

While emphasising the scalability of the concept of KLs, Abbott does not elaborate very much on the size distribution or durability of agglomerations. But he does explain some of the forces that limit their growth and prompt decay. Systematisation may be too rapid, rigid, detailed or dogmatic. Ideas are lost as pioneers burn-out, retire, fail to pass on what they take for granted and become resistant to incorporation of new priorities. Rival KLs grow, encroach and coalesce, and form new canons. Overreach in pursuit of novelty undermines credibility, and relaxing core assumptions weakens core methods and narratives. But without new avenues for research and innovation excitement and enthusiasm wear off.

This emphasis on an evolutionary process of ordering knowledge fits well with a complexity theory perspective on social sciences, such as explored by Room (2008) for SP and numerous authors for DS, suggesting one avenue for convergence. An evolutionary perspective also informs many accounts of the history of DS as the rise and fall of multiple, overlapping and contested 'paradigms', or what North (1990) refers to as shared mental models and we can equally well refer to as KLs or sub-KLs of DS.[5] These core narratives generally start out with variations on the theme of modernisation and finish with variations on the theme of post-development thinking (e.g. Hunt, 1989; Pieterse, 2001). The demarcation of lineages reflects perceived cleavages in the values and interests of rival stakeholder groups and their champions, but they also co-evolve through open deliberation with others, can be viewed as at least potentially complementary and open to synthesis.[6] For example, the neo-liberal and economic growth oriented Washington consensus was partly defined in opposition to a more statist and human development oriented New York consensus (Gore, 2000). These can then be viewed as having jointly contributed to efforts of the so-called global development community to build a coherent intellectual synthesis, and to operationalise it through the Millennium Development Goals and the new architecture of development cooperation (Gore, 2013). Of course in so doing, they also helped to reinforce the identity of more radical lineages standing outside of both.

In so plotting the genealogy of DS it is often difficult to distinguish it from wider currents across the social sciences. Brett (2009) offers one useful clarification of the difference. He first defines "normal social science" as concerned with reconciling structural (historical-evolutionary) and liberal perspectives on the role of market, state and civil society in a long-term process of scientifically-informed institutional change towards a social system that protects people from oppression in any form – social, political and economic. This tradition is pluralist in its recognition that no single universal institutional pathway can possibly be optimal for all countries. But at the same time he is critical of the generic prescriptions associated with it: economic liberalisation, multi-party democracy, good governance, human rights and so on. The

[5] North's starting point is similar to Abbott's: confronted by the overwhelming complexity of social systems those operating within them (be they states, individual investors or academics) have no option but to base their analysis and action on a set of often intuitive simplifications or partial models of reality. These mental models acquire extra power and influence the more widely they are shared and incorporated into the institutions regulating social relations, including both formal rules and informal norms. These resist canonization or subsumption because they overlap, compete with each other and evolve.

[6] I am using the term co-evolution as short hand for a view of change that emphasises what Room and Brown (2013) refer to as a "contingent historical model" of change, in contrast to what they call the "general linear model." See also Abbott (2001).

challenge for DS, he suggests, is precisely to go beyond such orthodoxies by analysing the path-dependent and 'second-best' (and worse) policy options open to developing countries in their pursuit of a pluralist liberal democratic ideal (p.177). He calls such strategies "hybrid" in the sense that they cannot assume away existing values and institutions, including clientelism, racism, informality and patriarchy, for example. For example, if strong democratic government, competitive markets and open civic institutions are the goals of human development, then we cannot assume they already exist as means to its achievement - a point that hardly applies only to low income countries. Nor will it necessarily be possible to advance on all institutional fronts at once.

It is easy to devote a lot time to exploring variations in the narrative of DS as a loose and contested set of KLs co-evolving with its historical habitat. But it is very unlikely we would end up with a definitive account, or perhaps even want to do so. Just as finalising a universal list of human needs can be viewed as the negation of what it means to be an autonomous human being, so a definitive account of development (means and ends) can be construed as inconsistent with the very idea of development. Given this, then a contemporary case for DS as a KL can arguably be established less on the basis of the precise content of its core historical narrative than a claim to expertise in distinguishing between different models of development, identifying their assumptions and disconnects, exposing the interests behind them, and carving out a meaningful role as researcher, interpreter, mediator, educator and broker of the different stakeholders affected by it (particularly, if not always convincingly, of those people most impoverished and marginalised by the development ideas and projects of those with more wealth and power).[7]

A simple model can be used to illustrate this core purpose of DS.[8] This starts with the proposition that three sets of assumptions about wellbeing underpin any way of thinking about development: first, as a normative goal (how the world should be); second, as historical reality (how the world actually is); and third as an agenda for action or praxis (how it could be, or the gap between how it is and should be can feasibly be narrowed). The evolutionary rationale here is that a colligation of ideas that lacks a coherent narrative encompassing all three components lacks credibility, political traction and hence sustainability.[9] Realistic praxis without ideals is open to attack for opportunism, realistic idealism without praxis fails to meet the need to legitimatise development actors, and idealistic praxis lacking in realism is wishful thinking.[10] Within this simple framework DS can then be defined as an arena of struggle over ways of combining

[7] The starting point for this list was Woolcock (2006).

[8] For a more detailed discussion of this model see Copestake (2008). An interesting point of comparison is provided by Max-Neef (2005) who also identifies trans-disciplinary projects with synthesis across the study of reality (pure sciences), ways of doing (including planning, design, politics, law) and of deciding what we must do. He also emphasises the importance of identifying higher levels of reality to trans-disciplinary projects. In contrast, Sumner and Tribe (2008) offer a more eclectic and inductive analysis of DS in three dimensions.

[9] The model can also be linked to Abbott's idea of colligation as the basis for sustaining knowledge lineages through iteration between methodological innovation (praxis), that fills gaps in our knowledge of how the world is (realism). He leaves implicit the normative assumption that all new knowledge is good.

[10] While it may be helpful, I am not of course suggesting that the influence of ideas depends solely on their internal coherence, or that this is necessary for them to be useful to the powerful.

normative goals and historical theories into agendas for practical action to reduce the gap between different stakeholders' aspirations and perceptions of reality. This covers the whole gamut of institutions (from log frames to the global goal setting) used to legitimate and guide trans-national development cooperation. It also entails analysing congruence and disjuncture in the ideas behind groups of stakeholders as the basis for understanding and evaluating their actual and potential interactions.[11]

A definition of DS centred on this core role helps to explain its resilience as a KL precisely because it can thrive on the chaotic churning in fads and fashions that international development is renowned for. Turning this model on itself, DS draws energy by attracting protagonists with aspirations to promote better mutual understanding (how the world should be) between multiple stakeholders with interdependent but diverse views of development (how the world is), in order to facilitate more effective interaction, ranging from partnership to conflict management (how the world could be). Incursions into the field of international development by academics from other KLs – ranging from international studies and geography to behavioural economics and political ecology - can then be viewed as an opportunity as well as a threat, particularly if their own 'takes' on development options are constrained by assumptions and traditions of subsumption and canonization adapted for other purposes. For example, to the extent that problems of material scarcity and redistribution (core to economics) are eclipsed by problems of identity and recognition (core to sociology) - or vice versa - so DS can borrow more or less from these and other KLs as appropriate.

3. A future for development studies: assimilation into social policy?

Abbott's reason for theorising about the organisation of knowledge is to facilitate analyse of the movement of ideas. His framework avoids the trap of taking an overly static view by emphasising how such movement takes place across shifting KLs, rather than fixed disciplinary bunkers and silos, which he emphatically denies they have ever been. This fits with the original motivation of this paper also: to contribute to the conversation between two distinct but similar KLs - DS and SP. This section can be viewed as a case study through which Abbott's ideas can be explored further. More specifically, it employs the three dimension model introduced in the last section to depict a possible colligation within SP (comprising ways of thinking about poverty), and to reflect on its potential to assimilate much of what DS currently does. This scenario of DS being assimilated into SP is simplistic in the way it depicts both, and may be read as more illustrative than definitive of their full relationship. Either way it also illustrates the importance of analysing the movement of ideas in historical context, rather than regarding it as a metaphysical activity.

The core narrative about poverty that I have in mind starts with pioneering research by Chadwick, Booth, Rowntree and others into the measurement of poverty in nineteenth century

[11] For example, in Copestake (2011) I use this framework to distinguish between four shared mental models of development in Peru prioritising disposable income, basic needs, human rights and community identity. These are then systematically compared with data on the aspirations and goals of people living in poor communities across the central part of the countries.

Britain. The historical context is one of imperial pretensions, rampant capitalism, rapid industrialisation and mushrooming cities. As average incomes increased so the normative goal shifted from absolute poverty to relative deprivation and from satisfaction of basic material needs to wider notions of social justice. How to reduce the gap between rising aspirations and the persistence of relative poverty and injustice? While recognising the role of trade-unions and capitalists (as entrepreneurs, employers, tax-payers) the main narrative drive centred on the role of national governments, both as the direct provider of education and welfare services, and of legislation regulating employment and other practices. After decades of political struggle and two world wars this narrative spawned a mature and cohesive KL. Both theorists of social justice and empirical researchers, such as Townsend, helped to refine the normative vision. Meanwhile Polanyi (1944) provided a post-Marxist teleology emphasising the inevitability of social and political responses to the excesses of capitalist commodification. Fuelled by proliferating policy experiments across health, education, housing, social protection, and more, the associated practical agenda spawned a huge applied literature encompassing policy studies, public administration and social work, with debate over the appropriate institutional mix between state, market, family and civil society continuing unabated. UK SP specialists also linked up with like-minded groups across the industrialised world to compare and contrast national experiences, and the scope for transnational collective action, including regional policy coordination across Europe and beyond. In short, we see the emergence of a mature KL. While closely associated particularly to sociology, it borrows freely and creatively from economics, politics, psychology, history and other disciplines with respect to both theory and method. Yet despite this eclecticism, it retains a coherent framework for debating how the world should be, is and could be.

How does this SP framework relate to its DS cousin? DS probably draws on an even broader range of traditions and has a more contested core. Decolonisation and the primacy of political self-determination was its crucible, and for many international and internal neo-colonialism remains a central concern: not least given the problematic role of DS itself in propagating Western dominated or mediated ideas. For the more anthropologically inclined its core resides in the study of deeper cross-cultural encounters, particularly between variants on the idea of modernity. From a more economic perspective the dominant twin issues are first, how to trigger and sustain economic growth in relatively poor countries, and second, how to ensure this growth is sufficiently widely shared to reduce the incidence of absolute poverty - principally through employment creation. My own take, as developed in the last section, is that the core of DS as a KL is as an arena for assessing and contesting these and other views of development. This certainly keeps it fresh and lively, but falls well short of the coherent shared mental model (along with mechanisms for disciplining members) of more mature KLs.

This view of the identity of DS is a subjective one and would remain precarious even if internally agreed. This is because the way DS is perceived and moulded by outsiders is also important and path dependent. For example, regardless of its internal values and diverse views of global history the social identity of DS is also powerfully moulded by its links to the foreign donor and an international cooperation nexus that has been its primary audience and paymaster. This exposes it to criticism from the left through association with an industry that is regarded as at best a fig-leaf, and from the right who regard it as a wasteful perpetuator of dependency. The main defence against these criticisms has always been the over-riding imperative to seek better ways

to address unacceptably high levels of absolute poverty and injustice across the globe, and the extraordinary levels of cross-country inequality that helps to sustain it. However, this defence has been weakened both by the improved economic performance of a growing number of catch-up countries, and by global progress in reducing headline figures for global absolute poverty (Chandy et al., 2013; Sumner, 2013; The Economist, 2013). While progress towards absolute poverty elimination is based on extremely low benchmarks, it will not be easy to convince the public in rich countries that these should now be raised.

Confronted by this potential loss of support, and perhaps also chastened by its own slow progress in globalising its membership and governance, this may be an appropriate historical juncture for DS to identify itself with a KL, such as SP, that through preoccupation with national policy agendas is less tainted by association with post-colonial politics and inequality. Reverting to my three dimension model of development, a more global version of SP can be sketched as follows. First, its normative vision of wellbeing is of global social justice based on a multi-dimensional understanding of wellbeing and of the adverse effects of relative poverty.[12] Second, the abandonment of absolute in favour of relative poverty also reflects a shared historical analysis of a second and more fully global if rather less deterministic double transformation in the spirit of Polanyi: globalised commodification (particularly of purchasing power through financialisation, natural resources and labour power) triggering a complex set of social and political reactions ranging from support for social enterprise and the solidarity economy to reactionary nationalism and religious bigotry. Third, the practical dimension centres on building a global system of social protection (subject to the principle of subsidiarity where possible), including cash transfers and other forms of universal and preferably unconditional basic income guarantee (Standing, 2009).

So there we have it: the basis for a potential merger (and colligation) of DS with international SP, although like most mergers one party is likely to gain more than the other (subsumption). Already it is possible to identify elements of this happening. As China, India, Brazil and other large middle income countries experience the negative social consequences of rapid economic growth and urbanisation (including rising inequality, alienation, family breakdown, substance abuse and crime) so the need to invest in national SP capacity rises up the KL pecking order relative even to growth economics, business and finance. By comparison DS as currently constituted seems insufficiently focused and specialised. Meanwhile, many researchers from a DS background find themselves specialising on issues that could equally be described as belonging to SP, including public health, educational inclusion, social protection and policy evaluation. These are all issues around which it is feasible to build stronger contractual relations with national governments in low and middle income countries alongside those with international NGOs, official donors and private foundations.

Who should welcome or resist such a movement of DS in this direction and why? One way to address these questions is to borrow from Berry's typology of acculturation in migration by distinguishing between assimilation where the original identity is abandoned, marginalisation

[12]The shift in language from 'international' to 'global' reflects not only social globalisation but also rising understanding of human and planetary co-dependence (Gough, 2013; Lovelock, 2014).

where it is retained but ignored, and integration where a new identity grows out of those of both place of origin and destination (Berry, 1997). In order to evaluate this scenario it is clearly necessary to be explicit about whose interests are being taken into account in weighing up the pros and cons. For SP the selective assimilation of parts of the KL of DS is likely to be seen as a positive stimulus, accelerating and enriching its internationalisation. It is worth providing some examples to illustrate this point.

- First, and at the national level, Lavers (2013) argues that any talk of SP in Ethiopia that does not address land policy is virtually meaningless, because despite rapid recent economic and urban growth it remains overwhelmingly an agrarian society. The political economy of agrarian change is of course familiar territory for DS, and it can be argued that it has contributed already to the literature on how rural social protection policies can be integrated with policies for sustainable rural livelihood transformation.[13]
- Second, and at a regional level, Sanchez-Ancochea and Franzoni (2013) question how far national welfare regimes in Latin America can usefully be assessed in isolation from national systems of production and the issue of their global competitiveness.
- Third, and at the global level, Gore (2010) argues that to understand the long swings of capitalism it is necessary to blend insights from Polanyi with a better understanding of the periodicity of technological change in the spirit of Kondratieff.

All three examples suggest potential benefits to analysis beyond the traditional scope of SP, but at the risk of reduced specialisation and focus on core concerns with public policy and administration. Conversely, they all illustrate what those who migrate from DS to SP might find being marginalised or lost. The fusion of ideas may rejuvenate, but it can also confuse and undermine the coherence of KLs that existed independently to serve distinct purposes and interests.

In thinking about how to evaluate such mergers Abbott emphasises the case for considering their effects not only on specific KLs but also across the social sciences as a whole, and he explores possible criteria for doing this. Under systems based on canonisation and subsumption changes in knowledge organisation can be evaluated relatively easily according to whether or not they improve overall consistency and coherence. But this is less straightforward for competing, colligating and evolving KLs. The task is further complicated by our own presence within the knowledge space – egocentric ordering of knowledge can be coherent and consistent, but this doesn't make it comprehensive or reliable, for example. Abbott's response it to suggest that even if we can't measure the totality of possible knowledge across the social sciences we can think of it as a hypothetical space, and ask how real changes in its organisation are likely to increase or detract from our collective consciousness. Abbott suggests two criteria for doing so that seem to be particularly important, which he calls plenitude and plurality.[14]

[13] For the case of Ethiopia, see for example Rahmato et al. (2013) and Devereux (2014).

[14] He also discusses a "bounded recurrence" criterion, but this is a special case of plenitude which he emphasises to warn against closing off any potential knowledge space within the zone of possible thinking. For example, structural theories shouldn't shut out agency based theory for too long or vice versa. Yawning gaps, he points out, create space for dissenters to mount more radical revolutions (see

Plenitude entails being open to the radically new, and he offers examples where methods pioneered within one discipline are applied to subject domains traditionally claimed by another. For example, as economists increasingly borrow from mathematics, it is helpful for the social sciences as a whole, he suggests, that sociology has engaged more with political economy. As it is impossible for us to occupy all fields of knowledge employing all feasible methods, he stresses the importance of letting our imaginations roam: plenitude is openness to new possibilities, aiming to sustain the richest knowledge space possible.

Abbott's second criterion is plurality, and refers to knowledge resilience arising from access to the same knowledge space from different angles. Most social science is rediscovered, he observes, and it is better for each KL to be accessible through multiple entry points. Plurality helps to ensure fertile areas of understanding are not neglected or forgotten for too long. It also reduces the risk of such areas being guarded over zealously by one set of gatekeepers.

So when to borrow? Abbott suggests a general predisposition to encourage borrowing as an antidote to strict clustering that would risk leaving gaps. Strict demarcation and mutual avoidance might promote plenitude but would weaken plurality. The dynamic nature of the model is important here. Incursions can help to get new KLs going. But these can then benefit from periods of isolation in which to develop distinctive ways of thinking without having to defend new assumptions from any quarter. Once they reach a certain age it is important that KLs open up, even if some loss of coherence inevitably results.

Abbott finishes by suggesting four "intuitive" rules for borrowing. First, avoid reductionism because by trivialising the knowledge of others this reduces both plurality and plenitude.[15] Second, beware superficial affiliations in the form of less challenging alliances with like-minded groups. This risks the tendency for attributes of knowledge to coalesce into clusters with deeper cleavages between them – positivist versus constructivist, for example (Abbott, 2001). Third, borrow something specific, and then work it out in detail rather than attempting harmonization of ideas across a broader front. Fourth, don't let borrowing crowd out new thinking within growing KLs, as this contradicts the plenitude principle.

Returning to the case of DS and SP, it seems likely that convergence along the lines suggested above would go against the plurality principle. Against this, there is the possibility that plenitude could be enhanced through rationalisation of activities, achievement of greater critical mass and deeper specialisation. While engagement with DS might broaden the scope and reach of SP somewhat, it would more likely narrow that of DS by reducing the attention given technical and economic aspects of production, for example. Moreover, it can also be argued that ideas already

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also Abbott, 2004). This may make social science more entertaining, but at the cost of consistency and utility.

[15] This reflects Abbott's overarching epistemology – if social science could be cumulative (i.e. subsumption was possible or canonisation sufficient) then reductionism would play a stronger role. But it is also in keeping with a wider move away from reductionist vogues, such as rational choice theory and evolutionary biology. However, wishing a pox on all reductionist projects is not to reject the importance of rigour and community governance of bodies of knowledge, just to deny the idea that these can be hierarchically imposed. Strong and hierarchical lineages are good so long as there are lots of them!

move easily between the two fields and other close cousins.[16] A further danger is that convergence with SP could reinforce a bias in DS towards positive public policy responses to problems at the expense of links with security, conflict, international relations and political economy.

Abbott's rules also generally seem to reinforce the case against greater convergence between SP and DS along the lines suggested above. Although Polanyi's ideas are multi-disciplinary and holistic, ordering DS and SP more strictly and narrowly within a framework of social embeddedness and (de)commodification could be reductionist – even if less so than unreconstructed neo-liberalism. Likewise although they are both internally open to disciplinary pluralism, closer affiliation could reinforce a tendency for them both to demonise disciplines with more positivist traditions, particularly economics. The idea of a broader merger along the lines suggested above is not necessary and may even be a distraction from exchange of more specific ideas embedded within it, such as the relation between social protection and social justice, as explored by McGregor and Devereux (2014), for example. On the other hand, it could stimulate new and undeveloped lines of collaborative enquiry. For example, there is scope for comparing the values, norms and rules of social work in different countries with those of development workers, including how to combine sociological analysis with the growth of a more individualised psycho-social analysis of poverty (White, 2012).

4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to contribute to on-going conversation between the academic fields of development studies and social policy. I have done this by drawing on reflections about the organisation of ideas across the social sciences offered by Andrew Abbott, in which he generally defends its chaotic and coevolving state against would be systematisers and rationalisers by emphasising the importance of maintaining an evolving plurality of "knowledge lineages" through which to confront the complexity and dynamism of the social world.

In this paper I have suggest that global economic convergence and the falling incidence of extreme absolute poverty pose a challenge to the historical niche of DS, which has also struggled to disassociate itself from the paternalistic and neo-colonial overtones that cling to the development industry it serves, and which is in turn subordinate to a deeply inegalitarian global establishment. DS as an academic specialisation, or KL, is also challenged by inhabiting a broad field of study - international development - upon which many other KLs graze. For these reasons one not unattractive future scenario for DS is for it to converge with SP, thereby accelerating and enlarging its global and comparative international capacity and focus. More specifically, such convergence resonates with a powerful narrative of the late Twentieth Century globalisation of Polanyi's double movement and a shifting policy focus from absolute to relative poverty.

Abbott's reflections on what constitutes good borrowing of ideas within the social sciences on the whole weigh against such convergence across a broad front, while encouraging more specific

[16] SP did not need DS to discover and assess the wider validity of lessons from conditional cash transfers in Latin America. A specific example is how the experience of *Oportunidad* in Mexico influenced the design of the Education Maintenance Allowance for 16-18 year olds in the UK (Paul Gregg, personal communication).

and opportunist collaboration in relation to specific ideas and issues. Convergence would also risk undermining and weakening the role of DS as a nodal point for critical analysis and debate over the congruence and disjuncture between different models of development, including those instigated or reinforced by narrower academic traditions.

However, it should be recognised that Abbott's own interest is in the health of the social sciences for its own sake - an identity with universal pretensions still subject to strong Western institutions and cultural influences. Advocates of DS have always struggled between their loyalty to 'the academy' and a sharper political commitment to social justice centred on the political interests of the world's poorest people. The risk of a modest reduction in academic pluralism that a stronger association with SP might require could be a price worth paying if it helps to strengthen academic capacity to support this struggle.

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