Chapter 5

Social science as direction indicator. The role of the researcher in an improvising society


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Abstract

This chapter investigates the role of social research in a society developing through ‘improvisation’ and ‘crafting communities’; it examines two concrete cases of knowledge production in cooperation with practice. Knowledge gives direction to the process of crafting and improvising but is simultaneously a product of that very process. A researcher who is engaged in social improvement will be a participant and an observer at the same time. Social science has always played this role in the tradition of action research, a tradition that goes back to the 1940s, when Kurt Lewin was seeking a more productive and supportive form of research. In an improvising society this manifestation of pragmatism becomes radicalized because researchers are no longer unproblematically granted a monopoly on knowledge.

27 This chapter is a revised version of the chapter “Social Science as a direction indicator”, included in Boutellier and Trommel, forthcoming
Introduction

“The improvising society” (Boutellier 2013) and ‘crafting communities’ (Trommel 2013) are two closely related notions that express current changes in European societies. These changes include a more prominent role for civil society in social welfare and security, public governance based on networks of (local) actors and a new type of order based on the ‘structured spontaneity’ that emerges in this networked society. The ideas of improvising society and crafting communities have been explored through examining diverse practices in the realm of social policy and security (Boutellier and Trommel, to be published). In this chapter we focus on the production of scientific knowledge in the context of a society characterized by crafting and improvising, with specific attention to the social sciences.

The idea of improvisation refers to the interplay of different actors in heterogeneous communities developing around specific problems. After the decline of big collective ideologies, in a context of decreasing steering and financial capacities of nation states and localization of social policy issues, novel types of social steering emerge in which civil society actors have an important role. The tackling of public problems is not only dependent on the cooperation of heterogeneous types of actors with different problem interpretations; it is also caught in the tension between local logic and institutional constraint. In this context solutions emerge through a process of improvisation in which spontaneity and the freedom to draw on individual capabilities coexist with alignment and fine-tuning between actors within the framework of a specific institutional field (Boutellier 2013).

Good improvisation develops within crafting communities in which civil society, governmental institutions and professional expertise achieve a balanced interplay. If one of these spheres exclusively dictates solutions, the positive potential of improvisation and public craftsmanship is not realized (Trommel 2012, 2013). When balance is achieved, communities develop ‘in the shadow of problem-oriented cooperation’ which is value driven. (Boutellier and Trommel, forthcoming).

In a context of ‘socialized’ governance based on cooperation between actors from different spheres and with different rationalities in which no single sphere has supremacy over the others, knowledge production becomes a source contributing to value-driven, problem-oriented cooperation. What does (socio-scientific) knowledge production look like in this novel social order? What challenges and possibilities does the emergent order present the social sciences?

The following will not so much look at how existing knowledge is employed in public craftsmanship but will take the metaphors of improvising and crafting as points of departure for characterizing specific practices of knowledge production itself. We will investigate, in other words, what it means to produce knowledge as engaged scholars. We do so theoretically but also with inspiration from two cases in which we ourselves were involved. We will describe cases from the Kenniswerkplaats-Tienplus and from the program ‘Security and citizenship’. The former is a platform in which researchers, policymakers, professionals and volunteers cooperate to create knowledge for the development of an inclusive system of parenting support. The latter is a cooperative project of the VU University Amsterdam with the municipality of Amsterdam and its police force.
As Van de Ven (2007) points out, engaged scholarship does not mean investing more in the dissemination of research results but engaging both academics and practitioners from different fields throughout all stages of the knowledge production process: ‘dissemination is too late if the wrong questions have been asked’ (Pettigrew in Van de Ven 2007: 6). The researcher who participates in crafting communities produces knowledge that is rooted in both the local knowledge of the crafting community and the universal body of knowledge of the academic community. She or he creates streams of knowledge flowing back and forth between local and universal levels.

Focusing on the social sciences, we explore the idea that they can be a source of *enabling knowledge*, to use the words of Stehr (2010). We consider meaning making in dialogue as a specific potential of the social sciences. After sketching the broader debate concerning the transformation of science, we will explore the idea of socially robust knowledge developed by Nowotny et al. (2001). Their analysis concerns the interplay between science and society, with an emphasis on the natural sciences. However, we will focus on this interplay as it regards the social sciences and will ponder what socially robust knowledge means in this context. Within this framework we will discuss the two mentioned cases of scientific knowledge production, reflecting on the challenges we encountered and presenting our conclusions.

**Discovery or support**

Against the background of an improvising society, science needs to reinvent its societal role to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing society. Scholars have typified this as a transition to a new type of ‘social contract’ between science and society (Gibbons 1999, Krishna 2014). This transition goes hand in hand with an extensive debate in which contrasting ideals of scientific knowledge production are at stake, one *discovery oriented* and one *support oriented*.

The discovery-oriented view of knowledge production represents a traditional model, which, although in decline, can certainly still be defended as an ideal worth guarding and pursuing. It is well conveyed in the recent annual lecture by the president of the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences (KNAW), Hans Clevers, who stated that:

> The real game changers do not arise from searching for targeted solutions, modifying existent products or building on already known principles. The real innovations come from the sleeve of basic science. They sprout from creative, sharp minds with a deep interest in humans, nature, and the world around them. Scientists, not driven by milestones and deliverables, but by a deep-seated, unbiased curiosity, with no more than a faint dot on, or even behind, the horizon […]. So you and I know hundreds of examples of personal sources of fascination, which eventually led to beautiful science. This fascination is almost without exception extremely individually inspired. And almost always the discoveries that result are unexpected and unpredictable.  

This ideal of knowledge production is one of individually based, curiosity-driven research carried out within a community of scientists who together build on each other’s work and create innovative

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disruptions that lead to new and unexpected pathways. Scientists are clustered within distinct scientific disciplines but joined by a common interest in high quality science and a scientific ethos such as that spelled out by Merton in his famous CUDOS\textsuperscript{29} norms. This model of scientific work is founded upon the pillars of academic freedom and autonomy of the scientific community (see for instance Polany 1962). Via self-directed control mechanisms, such as peer review, academic researchers, as a community of experts, ensure scientific quality and (internal) accountability.\textsuperscript{30}

Scientists, in this view, contribute to the growth of a largely consistent and interconnected body of knowledge. This model became institutionalized after the Second World War. Innovation, then, is a spin-off of scientific research in a linear way.\textsuperscript{31} A lot of trust is put in serendipity, as investments are made in basic research that are expected to somehow lead to discoveries that will bring benefits to society, albeit in unpredictable and uncontrollable ways. Science's contributions to society depend on the initial separation between the two – specifically, the independence and 'disinterestedness' of science. Societal relevance comes after – and, ideally, does not interfere with – the process of scientific inquiry. The extent to which scientific knowledge can be socially relevant depends on its scientific validity, which is in turn seen as contingent on researchers' freedom to do their work according only to the standards of their fields.

Since the early 1990s various influential analyses have signalled a transition to what is called 'post-academic', 'Mode 2' or 'post-normal' science (Ziman 2000; Gibbons et al. 1994; Ravetz 1999; Latour 1998). Post-academic science is highly contextualized, innovation driven and interpenetrated with society. Whether its practices are a genuine break from former scientific practices is a topic of debate (Nordmann et al. 2011), but they at least point to large-scale alterations in the model of science as described previously (see e.g., Martin 2003; Ziman 1994; Ziman 1996). We like to speak of support-oriented research, which celebrates the productive interplay between knowledge production and (social) development.

This ideal of science demands the direct involvement of researchers in problem solving and innovation as well as the involvement of stakeholders and citizens in general in the production of knowledge. Not separation and protection of the boundaries between science and society, but integration between them defines scientific quality and even validity. These changes have fuelled an animated analytic and normative debate concerning questions about the quality, independence and power of science. The support-oriented ideal is connected with a critique of the university as an 'ivory tower' and as a site of power from which large parts of society are excluded, which in turn is opposed by a critique on what is called 'the commodification of academic research' (see e.g., Radder 2010).

Support-oriented science is seen by critics as turning the university into a managerial site for entrepreneurship and valorisation and as a governmental effort to make academia more 'business

\textsuperscript{29} Merton's ethos of science comprises the following basic values: communalism, universalism, disinterestedness, originality and organized skepticism (CUDOS) (Merton 1942).

\textsuperscript{30} This view has been undermined mainly by the progress of Science and Technologies Studies, where science is studied as a social practice like any other social practice and emerges as a more earthy system governed by group processes, practical constraints, patterns of power, strategic choices and aligning interests throughout different social spheres (Shapin and Schaffer 1987, Latour 1987, Kuhn 1962).

\textsuperscript{31} What is known as the 'linear model of innovation' was elaborated in the historic report *Science: The Endless Frontier* by Vannevar Bush (1945), who was in charge of planning the post-war organization of science and technology in the United States.
oriented’ in order to ‘shorten the innovation chain’. The increasing intermingling between academic research and commercial parties is conceived as a threat to scientific autonomy and thereby to the quality and truly innovative potential of science\textsuperscript{32} (see for instance Moriarty 2008; Radder 2010; and Greenberg 2007). This is countered by a call for democratization of the scientific realm and increasing ‘scientific citizenship’ (Jasanoff 2004; Elam and Bertlsson 2003), both in terms of research agenda setting, participation in knowledge production (Callon 1999) and in terms of understanding ‘how science works’ (Shapin 1992; Hagendijk 2003).

Without directly taking sides in this debate, we want to contribute to it by reflecting on the concrete challenges social scientists encounter when engaging in support-oriented research. Therefore, before introducing our cases we will elaborate different aspects of support-oriented knowledge production, first by focusing on one of the most renowned analyses, namely, the distinction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 science provided by Gibbons et al. in 1994 and taken further by the same authors in Nowotny et al. 2001. Since their work mainly concerned the natural sciences and technology, our second step will be to explore specific aspects of support-oriented social science.

**Strong contextualization**

Gibbons et al. (1994) distinguished between Mode 1 knowledge and Mode 2 knowledge, reflecting the distinction between the discovery and support ideals of science we introduced in the previous section. Mode 1 science refers to fundamental research that is driven by curiosity and is not primarily focused on application. Mode 2 refers to a fashion of knowledge production that is context driven, problem focused and interdisciplinary. It involves bringing together teams from different scientific and societal fields for short periods of time to work on specific problems. It is characterized by a process of interpenetration in which boundaries between scientific and societal demands turn fuzzy, and products as well as concerns become ‘transgressive’.

Mode 2 reflects what we have called support-oriented research. Within this framework it becomes clear that ‘support oriented’ does not mean ‘in service of’ but rather refers to hybrid fields of knowledge production in which scientific enquiries and practical knowledge enrich each other. In their later work (Nowotny et al. 2011), the authors extended their analysis to society at large, which is characterized by increasing complexity, uncertainty and processes of self-organization. There is a need for new ordering principles and new configurations, which we associate with the idea of an improvising society. It is precisely the intermingling between an emerging social order and an emerging scientific configuration that results in the improvising ground where social scientists ‘get their hands dirty’.

Scientists often see contextualization as the constraints and demands imposed from the outside. They acknowledge these as a necessary burden, especially since funding is increasingly dependent on contextualization. When scientists attempt to accommodate externalities in order to defend their own autonomy and cognitive authority, there is weak contextualization. In contrast, support-oriented research has strong contextualization, which cannot be reduced to the accumulation of alleged externalities (Nowotny et al. 2011: 167). This sort of contextualization occurs ‘when researchers have the opportunity, and are willing, to respond to signals received from society’ (131), not only for

\[ \text{As well as to the freedom of scientists to pursue ‘disinterested’ science.} \]
the improvement of the practical employability of knowledge, but also to open the way for novel, practice-rooted perspectives in the formulation of scientific problems, methods and conclusions. To Nowotny et al., this attitude results in enrichment for the scientific community itself.

Strong contextualization leads to the production of socially robust knowledge. This is knowledge that not only holds under controlled conditions but can also apply under chaotic, unpredictable conditions. This criterion for ‘external validation’ entails a shift from a culture of scientific autonomy to a culture of accountability. The scientific field does not autonomously provide the foundation for consensus but participates in creating consensus, or striving for it. ‘What is at stake is the urgency to take the context seriously, to let it enter into the research that is being undertaken, since otherwise this research would miss its own objectives and goals’ (133–134). The new locus of knowledge production is ‘the agora’, where people engaged in different practices and fields meet. Scientists become co-responsible for the implications of scientific discoveries and research development. Implications is a wider concept than application (as it was presented in Gibbons et al. 1994) because it acknowledges the variation in and unpredictability of knowledge production.

Shifts towards support-oriented research are discernible in recent developments in the organization and funding of scientific research, such as the new EU program, Horizon 2020 or under the EU-created label of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI; see e.g., Rip 2014). In the Netherlands, the Science in Transition network seeks to contribute to rethinking the organization of academic science and to place dialogue between science and society higher on the policy agenda. However, just as virtually all the examples of socially robust knowledge provided by Nowotny et al, also these developments concern nearly exclusively the natural sciences and technology. The social sciences appear to have gained less attention in the current debate on socially robust knowledge, although more sensitivity regarding the importance of considering the role of social sciences in these developments appears to be on the rise (editorial in Nature, January 2015).

From episteme to phronesis

In the social sciences the support-oriented ideal is rooted in the tradition of pragmatism. It found early expression in Kurt Lewin’s (1946) idea of action research. His paradigmatic 1946 article pled for an engaged kind of research that aimed at social change and knowledge production simultaneously. Although he died in 1947, his idea of social action and research tied together in one scientific practice has grown into a comprehensive tradition (Reason and Bradbury 2008). This tradition has produced a great diversity of approaches classified with labels such as ‘participatory action research’, ‘appreciative inquiry’, ‘interactive research’, and others. Although they all differ, these approaches share a basic belief in social change as an aim of research. For many social scientists, however, the standards of social inquiry prescribe that researchers strive to pursue objective knowledge using a value-free, disengaged gaze.

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34 http://www.rri-tools.eu/
35 This is of course not meant to imply that there has not been a long and rich tradition of reflection on the relation with society within social science itself. But only to point out the relative invisibility of socio-scientific research in the present societal debate.
Scholars have noted that, in the social sciences, the discovery-oriented ideal (as we have called it) derives from a desire to emulate the natural sciences in their predictive and explanatory quality. To attain the same prestige and regard as researchers in the natural sciences, social scientists copy their methods, aims and ways of theory building. In his classic book *Making Social Science Matter*, Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that social inquiry is by definition doomed to fail in this attempt because human life and social action cannot be understood through context-independent knowledge and predictive theories. Using Aristotelian concepts he argues that social science should recognize its real nature in *phronesis*, an intellectual activity that can be described as ‘insightful deliberation’. Phronesis involves using value rationality and practical reasoning to discern good and bad action.

Phronesis is radically distinct from *episteme* (analytical scientific knowledge) and *techne* (technical knowledge or know how). The importance of phronesis lies in the human need to balance analytical and instrumental rationality with value-based rationality. Phronetic social science clarifies values, interests and power relations to support social action. Although social inquiry can pursue the production of general knowledge, it should see itself primarily as working towards the realization of a good society (Flyvbjerg in Schatzki 2002). It should seek answers for specific problems to four starting questions: (1) Where are we going? (2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this development desirable? (4) What, if anything, should we do about it? (Flyvbjerg 2001).

Between the detached analytic understanding of reality of *episteme* and the normative prescriptions that inhabit the realm of politics and law, social sciences can occupy a middle ground, which Boutellier (2013) identified as *Können* (in response to the notorious dichotomy between *Sein* and *Sollen*): showing the possible based on the existent. This recalls Stehr’s idea of ‘enabling knowledge’ (2010), which considers the existing social conditions and constraints, and shows the possibility of new courses of action. By using enabling knowledge, the social sciences act as ‘mind-makers’ (Robinson 1923, quoted by Stehr 2010), bringing to the fore new ways of conceptualizing and acting upon social realities, thereby producing enabling ideas and meanings (cf. Kaag 2009).³⁶

Stehr speaks, in contrast to more a traditional model of solid ‘scientificity’, of a ‘capacity model’, which stresses that the agents who “employ” social science knowledge are active agents, who transform, re-issue and otherwise re-design social science discourse. […] The capacity model stipulates that social scientific knowledge is an intellectual resource that is contingently open and complex … people may critically engage social science knowledge using local knowledge resources and thus make social science accountable to the public’ (Stehr 2010: 29). Socio-scientific knowledge production and its application in local contexts can be seen as forms of crafting in which social scientists participate together with other actors.

In summary, we have identified four core aspects of socially robust knowledge as an expression of crafting practices in social science research.

1. **Strong contextualization regarding the type of knowledge produced and the process of knowledge production.**

³⁶ ‘The power of mind-making rests with the power of the proposed concepts and ideas, as capacities to act, suggesting their potential realization as problem definitions and as solutions to problems’ (Stehr 2010: 29).
2. The validity of ‘socially robust’ knowledge, being valid in very concrete and local circumstances while contributing to the general body of knowledge.

3. Enabling knowledge that generates new conceptualizations of a specific reality and shows new courses of action based on existing conditions.

4. The concept of phronesis, which characterizes social sciences as involving value rationality and practical reasoning.

In an improvising society these aspects of social science pose new challenges that may lead to groundbreaking transformations if social scientists take their role ‘in the agora’ seriously and make it an object of extensive reflection. With this call in mind, we explore two examples of research engagement as a part of crafting communities. The first example is a project investigating the relation between professional support and informal networks that aid parenting practices. The second example is based on a long-standing cooperation between VU University and the municipality of Amsterdam and its police force.

The case of participatory research in the Kenniswerkplaats-Tienplus

The Kenniswerkplaats-Tienplus can best be described as a research and learning lab in which different research institutes, education institutes and local policy, professional and volunteer organisations worked together to produce knowledge regarding diversity and inclusivity in the youth care sector. The main aims were to increase understanding of parenting support programs for families with immigrant backgrounds and low socio-economic status in Amsterdam as well as their quality and user access.

Disclosing cooperation

The Disclosing Cooperation project was part of the Kenniswerkplaats. This project was conducted by the university, and thus it had a socio-scientific set-up, but at the same time, it was designed to contribute directly to improving relationships between the various parties involved in providing parenting support for immigrant families. The specific focus of the project was to strengthen cooperation between statutory services for parenting support and voluntary immigrant organizations that stand in direct contact with many families in need of support, often acting as trustees and offering informal help and counselling.

As trustees, migrant organizations regularly face problematic situations that are too demanding to handle on a voluntary basis. Moreover, volunteers usually lack the professional background that is required to deal with such issues. Professional parenting counsellors, on the other hand, do not easily gain the trust of these particular families in need of support. Although all involved parties think cooperation between volunteers and professionals is a good solution in principle, in practice such cooperation develops rarely and with difficulty, and does not last long. A preliminary inquiry showed that the involved parties feel that more should be done to support families in child-rearing. But different views on the aims and nature of cooperation between migrant organisations and professional institutes blocks the actual emergence of cooperative ties.

The Disclosing Cooperation project used ethnographic methods to map recurring tensions between volunteers and professionals. In-depth, qualitative interviews were held with twenty
organisations (voluntary and professional). The study also had participatory subparts and was directed at creating a fruitful interaction between theoretical perspectives and the experiences and views of respondents. Specifically, two instances of beginning cooperation were investigated through a participatory method. Here, participants from the cooperating organisations were actively involved in the research, and the researcher contributed directly to the development of further cooperation by employing the research process as a site for mutual dialogue and reflection.

**Participatory research**

The first instance of enabling research concerned the cooperation between two Moroccan organisations and a Youth and Family Centre (YFC) in Amsterdam Nieuw-West, studied in a subproject of Disclosing Cooperation (project YFC on the Spot). This subproject is described in chapter 4. As is more extensively explained there, participatory action research was used to analyse the different frames participants employed as well as the nature of the envisaged cooperation itself, and eventually, it was used to forge a new shared narrative about cooperation.

This subproject functioned as a ‘window of understanding’ in the larger research project (based on interviews in the city at large). Both the theoretical framework and the (preliminary) results from the larger project were shared with the participatory research participants and were used to reflect on participant experiences. At the same time the interchange with participants provided the researcher with new insights for interpreting and discussing the larger data set and translating general theoretical concepts to the local context.

The interplay between these two levels of knowledge production proved essential in two ways. First, the specific frames of the migrant organisations were difficult to bring to the surface due to communicative and social barriers. These barriers included unequal power relations (due to migrant organisations subordinate position in the broader social policy field), which hindered articulation of migrant experiences and views. Only by working closely together with the voluntary and professional participants, building a relationship of trust, was it possible to unravel the power relations and to shine some light on immigrant participants’ perspectives, which proved very relevant. Second, the interplay of knowledge production levels led to an intersection of the participatory project’s analyses with the wider research, producing a true enrichment of concepts (see chapter 4).

The second instance concerned a cooperative project in Amsterdam Zuidoost involving a Ghanaian organisation and professional organisations active in that district. In this project—which was also a subproject of Disclosing Cooperation- the researcher participated in monthly meetings between the parties and had frequent informal contacts with the actors involved, especially with the migrant organisation volunteers, which continued long after the project’s end. This subproject provided detailed information about the views and ambitions of the involved parties as well as the reciprocal tensions. These results were most relevant in terms of understanding cooperation

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37 The project is also described, with a stronger focus on the results than on the methods, in the report *Opvoeden in Diversiteit* (Ponzoni 2012).

38 The case is described in the report *Opvoeden in Diversiteit* (Ponzoni 2012).
between migrant organisations and professionals in general but were not as valuable to the project itself because they did not provide new information to the actors.

The researcher’s participation benefitted cooperation in other ways. For instance, based on information from the interviews, the researcher helped produce a detailed taxonomy of the types of roles volunteers could fulfil and helped volunteers present the project to a larger audience at a conference. Above all, the researcher helped the migrant organisation express its expertise and views to third parties on frequent occasions. The latter form of support was possible because of the in-depth understanding of the volunteers’ motives, views and ambitions that was gained through the research.

**Creating socially robust knowledge**

Overall, the Disclosing Cooperation project was strongly contextualised, following the general spirit of the Kenniswerkplaats. Apart from the participatory subprojects, the project involved frequent consults with stakeholders from the beginning. The aim was to share the knowledge produced throughout the process, contributing to conferences and symposia and ‘anchoring’ the produced knowledge with local policymakers.

The research contributed to a general understanding of migrant organisations’ position in Dutch social policy and their relation with statutory services, which has been described in different academic articles (chapter 2, 3 and 4 in this dissertation). It showed, for instance, mechanisms of talking past each other due to the use of different frames. This can be considered a form of enabling knowledge in that it provides practitioners with conceptual instruments to better grasp the dynamics of interaction with other actors: ‘It provided me with those concepts I needed in order to describe the problems I perceived around me, but couldn’t quite articulate.’

This study also revealed new connections between the work, motives and views of migrant organisation volunteers with the current objectives in social and youth policy. This is enabling knowledge in terms of Stehr’s appeal to show new courses of action based on existing conditions – the study showed the potential contribution of migrant organisations to Dutch social policy. The benefits are perhaps of more concern to policymakers and professionals than to volunteers. The municipality actually did employ the empirical results and conceptual distinctions to frame the challenges connected with engaging immigrant organisations in youth policy objectives. However, the impact of the research at this level remains quite limited.

The eventual impact of the Disclosing Cooperation project was highly dependent on the researcher’s readiness to continue investing in anchoring the knowledge in relevant social environments – in this case, especially in municipal social policy. Although the Kenniswerkplaats was set up as a cooperative lab, the leaders and ‘owners’ of the project remain the researchers. In the end, the decisive steps for change depend on the researcher becoming ‘activist’, defending the newly produced story that is owned by the research community. Without this leading voice, the innovative discourse might soon be overruled by other, more powerful stories or might just be

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39 Quote from a conversation with Cecile Winkelman, May 2012.
forgotten by over-busy policymakers, who may have previously declared the research results to be highly relevant.

**Strategies and challenges**

One challenge the researcher faced from the start was finding a good balance between pursuing (1) locally relevant knowledge and developmental support and (2) supra-local knowledge that was also academically relevant. The efforts one puts in developmental work will not automatically yield scientifically interesting knowledge. This is because, notwithstanding claims of a radical transformation of the institute of science, the academic community is strongly oriented towards discovery science. Conversely, when the researcher invests in knowledge production following an academic blueprint, the results (usually materialized in an academic article or at best a practically oriented report) will not automatically lead to change. This may be because they do not connect enough with the questions or needs of actors in the field or because they simply fail to gain enduring attention in the profusion of literature, manuals and reports produced every day.

In Disclosing Cooperation two different strategies dealing with the problem of balancing local relevancy and supra-local interest can be discerned. In the second subproject (with the Ghanaian organisation), the dilemma was solved through a kind of ‘bargaining’ situation. The researcher supported the development of cooperation with her knowledge (and knowledge gained through the research itself), and at the same time she was able to collect relevant data for the larger analysis. In this case the support aspects of the research and the discovery aspects coexisted. When discovery and support aspects coexist, it can be seen as an instance of weak contextualisation.

The approach was different in the subproject with the Moroccan organisations. Here the researcher worked towards merging the support and discovery aspects. This approach led to valuable results, in this specific case. However, it is a highly intensive approach that involves dealing with basic uncertainties regarding the research output. For instance, the research question itself must be constantly open to negotiation and change. As this case showed, to co-produce enabling knowledge, the researcher must go beyond a traditional researching role. The productive dialogue with migrant organisations and with professionals that occurred in this case could only take shape within a relationship of mutual trust and support, which required extensive investments of time and personal involvement.

In both subprojects the feeling of being part of a team that worked towards shared objectives was crucial. This experience recalls Marks et al.’s (2009) claim that the development of a personal relationship with participants may be needed, in particular contexts, to attain a productive research environment. Whereas, in academic realms, research questions and theoretical frameworks are defended in relation to conceptual clarity and the existing body of knowledge, in participatory research, considerations relating to the local context of the project become relevant.

Moreover, it might prove challenging to legitimize the great space and authority accorded to specific respondents. This is particularly so for the first case (with the Moroccan organizations), which functioned as a ‘window of understanding’ in the broader analysis of relations between migrant organizations and statutory services. In this model of research, scientific validity and social relevance depend on the balance between different perspectives in a complex field of power
relations. However, this does not necessarily mean that the knowledge produced will reflect a perfect synthesis of perspectives. It more likely means that shining light on less visible perspectives can prove especially fruitful in achieving enabling knowledge.

The Amsterdam program on security and citizenship

Since 2006 a program on the issues of security and citizenship has been based in the Department of Public Administration Studies at the VU University Amsterdam. The program aims for better relations between security policy, policing strategies and social research. This section of the chapter provides background information on this collaborative program and identifies ambivalences related to this type of knowledge co-production.

Context and beginnings

In the first years of the new millennium, security and safety were some of the hottest issues in politics and public opinion in Western societies. This was related to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, especially in the United States where they occurred, but these attacks actually resulted in a reinforcement of ongoing developments. Increased attention to crime and trouble with young people on the streets in the Netherlands had already begun in the mid-1980s in response to a crime rate that had been on the rise since the 1960s. Registered crime in Dutch society was about ten times higher in 2000 compared to 1960 (from 130,000 to 1,300,000 registered crimes; Huls et al, 2001). Crime had become a number one issue, based on the media attention it received and on public opinion surveys.

The first serious governmental response was the white paper Society and criminality (Ministerie van Justitie, 1985). It was meant to be a wake-up call about issues like petty crime, organized crime and juvenile delinquency. At the same time it was a thoroughly designed plea to invest in crime prevention and societal involvement in reducing crime (professionals and citizens). This paper can now be seen as the beginning of Dutch crime prevention policies. It was the start of an intensive trajectory in preventative security politics in the Netherlands, like those that were happening in other European countries. During the nineties crime prevention was more and more reframed as a ‘security problem’, which stimulated discourse in terms of risks, control, compliance and enforcement. So there was already a tradition of crime prevention and policing and security strategies when the security and citizenship program began.

Some of the people involved felt there was a need for a more productive relationship between citizens and preventative policies. There was also a belief that a stronger engagement of social science could support this relationship. Thus, the municipality of Amsterdam and the Amsterdam police established a fund for a research program on security and citizenship conducted in partnership with the VU Department for Public Administration Studies. The program was chaired by a half-time special professorship, and its motto was ‘independent and relevant’: the program should be as relevant as possible, but, for the sake of productivity, the chair would be responsible for the programming.

Part of the deal was the creation of two university posts to be filled by members of the police force. Thus, one or two police employees with academic backgrounds became members of the research
There was also a working relationship between the chair and the municipality's research and statistics department. The idea was to organize co-production of knowledge in a systematic way. A personal link between the police organization and the university would guarantee forms of enabling research. Relations with the municipality were a little more obscure. The five-year program started in April 2006 and was extended for another five years in 2011.

Organization and experience of security

Although there was mutual recognition of the security and citizenship theme's relevance, there was no initial gathering of the parties involved to elaborate the ideas behind the program. It was designed by the researchers and could count on a positive response from the funding parties. The design was based on two big ideas: the plural organization of security and the actual experience of security.

The first idea refers to a common observation in criminology and police studies that law enforcement by the traditional agencies (police and prosecutors) has been replaced by a broad approach in terms of prevention policy, risk management, control and surveillance strategies, and network policing. This tendency is referred to as responsibilisation (Garland 1996, 2001) or plural policing (Jones and Newborn, 2006) and is characterized as the politics of a safety utopia (Boutellier 2005). The program thus aimed to research and analyse the move towards responsibilisation and to support a preventative policy in which social partners and citizens could substitute for interventions of the traditional criminal justice system.

The second idea refers to the growing attention on the experience of crime (victimization) and the feelings of insecurity that surround the issue of crime and crime policy. Here, the program aimed to get a better handle on citizens' experience of security, with the goal of easing responses to crime, adding more social ideas on how to approach the crime problem and to get citizens more involved in preventing security problems. If possible, the program partners would relate the findings of both lines of research – responsibilisation and experience of security – to each other.

Although co-productive science was discussed, the relation between research and practice was understood merely in terms of cooperation. To avoid becoming part of the – at that time – struggling debate between the municipality and the police, the chair chose an independent position. Thus, use of the terms ‘independent and relevant’ was pragmatically motivated. Even though co-production was not emphasised, there were personal attachments between the university team and the police through the university-posted police employees and strong ties between the chair and some civil servants. This positioning was very helpful for the research program. However, for the police force, the main reason for posting employees at the VU was human resource management: as part of a career track.

The four characteristics of co-production of knowledge – socially robust, strong contextualization, enabling knowledge and phronesis – were occasionally realized. For example, the first two characteristics occurred through a police officer’s doctoral project on community policing (Van Caem 2012), which was conducted in close cooperation with the candidate’s colleagues. It had a strong contextualization and was socially robust. Nevertheless the results have never been very
influential because the project was not part of the policy process of that time. So, in this case, the second two characteristics were not realized. With other projects, it could be the other way around. The posting of police employees in the university created personal relationships that benefited both partners: the academic researchers were enriched by the police employees’ tacit knowledge, and the police employees spoke of an ‘enlightening experience’.

From 2006 on, the program produced dozens of publications (of which about twenty were peer reviewed), an inaugural speech, one monograph (Boutellier 2013), a handbook (Boutellier and Van Steden 2007) and several research reports. Several seminars and expert meetings were organized to strengthen the relationship between the program and policy making. In a 2011 self-evaluation based on interviews with stakeholders, the general conclusion was – an impressive academic production, but relations with the police and the municipality needed to be improved. Although opinions varied, the conclusion was that the relationship between knowledge production and knowledge usage could be tighter. A stronger contextualization was required to make the program ‘more enabling’, so to speak.

Towards a stronger contextualization

In the second period (2011–2016), some aspects changed. The program group underwent an internal shift (with a change of coordinator of the program), and more importantly, a new Mayor and a new Police Chief came in charge. This meant a completely new authority in Amsterdam security politics. In addition, the Dutch police (with 25 regional forces) were transformed into a national police force, which created a lot of job insecurity among employees. The goal for the second period was to intensify relations with the financing parties, but the position of the employees involved was not very stable. The new Mayor was suspicious of the program’s relevance. And the Amsterdam police were busy with the reorganization into a national police force. There also seemed to be a gap between the program and the political priorities of the time.

The idea was to move the program closer to the priorities of the so-called triangle of law enforcement (Amsterdam’s mayor, prosecutor and police chief). The intention to be independent and relevant had already been modified by the self-evaluation, which concluded that relations between the partners should be tighter. Substitution of the first program with a more co-productive second program was hard to realize, however. Researchers found it difficult to gain entrance to the new triangle, and the chair holder had difficulty finding the right ideas for establishing a new program for the second period. Relations with the funding parties could only be improved by subordination to the priorities of the triangle. Thus, a new relationship for producing enabling knowledge was only partially realized.

The program is still running and it still has university-posted police employees. There have been interesting projects (e.g., on the fear of crime and trust in the police), sometimes in close cooperation with the police (e.g., a project on police volunteers). There have also been projects closely related to the priorities of the triangle (on the governance of policing and on cooperation between social professionals and the police). But the programming has been quite ad hoc rather than the outcome of an intensive programming trajectory. In the context of this chapter, some

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40 This is understandable due to the pressure and urgency of actual law enforcement issues.
observations can be made, with the caveat that the above descriptions come from just one of the involved parties (the chair holder).

**Some observations**

First, there was never a mutual agreement and understanding of what cooperation between social scientific research and policy and practice would actually mean. The motto ‘independent and relevant’ was chosen from a pragmatic point of view – to be as productive as possible and to avoid becoming too involved in policy affairs. The other side of this stance was that – from the beginning – there was no collaborative programming and mutual ownership of the research program. For the second period of the program, there was agreement on creating a better – crafting – relationship, but this was obscured by internal changes among the partners and a different policy context.

Second, co-production of knowledge presupposes some mutual respect and understanding of each other’s perspectives and expertise. There is a difference between a researcher’s position and a policymaker’s. A researcher is working in an academic context and is expected to follow the university regime with respect to academic output, education obligations and, above all, systematic, rational, product-oriented thinking. Research projects need time and space, and especially coherence and consistency, to become part of the academic body of knowledge. In this program there were tensions between the academic demands and the pressures of policy making. During the second period, researchers were expected to have a kind of flexibility, like that of the civil servant.

The co-production of knowledge also depends on the engagement of the parties involved. But the bottom line of this approach is that the knowledge searched for is really desired by these parties. The very idea of the security and citizenship program was to enable citizen-oriented security and safety politics. By adopting the frame of independent research, however, mutual ownership of the program did not develop. There was at most a quite formal support for the program’s projects and outputs. Therefore, when the key persons changed, there was little commitment left. This ‘break’ was repaired by a partial turn towards the priorities of security politics. Eventually, some characteristics of knowledge co-production were realized in individual projects. But for the program as a whole, there was insufficient mutual recognition and common ownership.

Co-production of knowledge presupposes an investment in elaborating the philosophy, goals and mutual expectations at the start. This is the main lesson learned from the security and citizenship program. At the same time, we must conclude that the applied and academic output of the program was quite substantive. This may not have been the case if the ‘independency’ of the program had not been claimed. The hectic political context of the subject (security), with two competing partners, raises doubts of whether the co-production of knowledge could have ever been realized. Enabling knowledge presupposes parties who want to be enabled.

**Conclusion**

The idea of an improvising society has prompted us to reflect on the sort of social science research that fits in that specific social order. In this section we summarize its contours and draw conclusions about the specific challenges that emerged from our cases. We began this chapter by
characterizing support-oriented research and discovery-oriented research – the two ideal types of science that inform the current debate about the future of science. Although social research in the context of an improvising society is certainly support oriented, this does not mean that science is simply ‘at the service of practice’ or that researchers should sacrifice scientific interests to the societal, economic or practical interests of external parties. Also, it does not mean that scientific research should be limited to developing existing assumptions into applicable products, like suggested in the excerpt from Hans Clevers’ speech that we reported at the beginning of this chapter. Creating a connection between the scientific field and other societal fields in the context of knowledge production (and not just in the context of dissemination or application) does not in itself contradict the need to critically consider given practices or the assumptions they imply, or to look for innovative ways to employ the existent body of knowledge to reframe questions and interpret data.

In the type of knowledge production we described, the challenge is to develop converging lines of fundamental and practice-oriented knowledge by working in knowledge communities with a diversity of members. Following Nowotny et al., this is socially robust knowledge as a product of a crafting community. This was very much the case in the Kenniswerkplaats examples. Although there was a comparable aim in the security and citizenship example, a crafting knowledge community was not realized.

We also identified four central parameters of socially robust knowledge as an expression of crafting practices in social science research. The first is strong contextualization, which concerns the process of knowledge production. Knowledge is produced in a permanent dialogue between scientists and practitioners, where both bring in relevant knowledge and expertise that enriches the process. The second parameter concerns validity: The knowledge must be valid in very concrete and local circumstances. But it must simultaneously form a contribution to the existing body of knowledge. The third aspect concerns enabling knowledge, which means that the research generates new conceptualizations that show new possible courses of action based on existing conditions. Finally, the fourth aspect concerns the concept of phronesis, which characterizes social sciences as an engaged type of research involving value rationality and practical reasoning to achieve socially relevant change.

The cases we examined show examples of academic research in which the above aspects were pursued (albeit to different extents). Studies conducted within the security and citizenship program, as well as the participative research in the Kenniswerkplaats, generated knowledge that could not have been produced without the active involvement of actors from the fields of practice. That knowledge had to be valid in real, local conditions and had to enable social change by showing possible courses of action based on existing realities. Moreover, all of these research projects were strongly value driven. However, the cases also reveal difficulties and challenges, both at the level of producing socially robust knowledge and at the level of making that knowledge work in practice.
(academic) production. This would not have been achieved had a great amount of energy been invested in time-consuming processes of cooperative programming. The knowledge produced has a potentially high relevance, partly due to its co-production with police officers appointed as researchers. However, it enabled innovative practices only to a limited extent.

In contrast, the Kenniswerkplaats was set up from the beginning in the spirit of socially robust knowledge: creating a heterogeneous knowledge-community in which research could be co-produced to shine new light on current and future practices was central to the initial design of the lab. This surely also holds for the participatory subprojects that we focused on here. Much energy was invested in engaging the relevant parties in a shared knowledge quest. However, the Kenniswerkplaats case revealed specific challenges connected with co-produced research. Producing enabling socio-scientific knowledge involved conveying perspectives that were hard to articulate and could be brought to the surface only through close and enduring interactions between researcher and participants. The Kenniswerkplaats case revealed ways of coping with the difficulties of producing supra-local relevant knowledge that is also directly relevant and usable in the local context in which it is produced.

The investments of time and personal engagement required in this type of process are hard to combine with the typical requirements associated with an academic position, such as maintaining high (time-efficient) publication rates, justifying theoretical and methodological choices based only on scientific standards and meeting expectations concerning the scientific ideal of objective distance. Based on both the Kenniswerkplaats and the security and citizenship cases, we can generalize some core conditions concerning the initial set-up and the additional process of socially robust social research.

I Mutual respect for participant positions

The challenge of producing enabling knowledge while meeting academic standards refers to one of the characteristics of crafting communities. Participants stand with one foot in their own field of practice and the other foot on improvising ground. They participate in processes that generate products that must enrich different fields simultaneously. Every participant is responsible for the validity of these products in his or her own field. Respect for the position of the other is essential in this process. The security and citizenship case makes it particularly evident that an authoritative stance and a lack of respect for researcher’s position severely hinder the production of socially robust knowledge. The funding role of the parties involved might have caused this uneven relation.

An important difference of the Kenniswerkplaats case is that the most important partners (professional and volunteer organizations and the municipality) were not the financing parties. This difference in the distribution of power in the security and citizenship case could have had a major impact on the course of that project’s process. In addition, the urgency of security issues generates pressure on the parties involved, which make them look for direct support for their policy goals. For example, the new mayor of Amsterdam especially preferred a restrictive and punitive policy for repeat offenders. This was quite different from the broad perspective of the security and citizenship program. It enlarged the gap between policy and program, a program for which policymakers still had to pay.
II Shared ownership

Another core challenge concerns the extent to which socially robust knowledge can actually lead to social change. Enabling knowledge does not necessarily include the dynamic ways in which this knowledge is anchored, employed and enrolled in actual practice. Is producing knowledge that is potentially enabling enough to call it robust? Should the actual impact of the research project not be part of the game? How far should the researcher take co-responsibility for the capitalization of the knowledge produced? The cases discussed in this chapter show that many obstacles to the actual impact of produced knowledge lie in wait. From the experiences we described it follows that a core condition – one that must be met – when striving for socially robust knowledge is realizing shared ownership of the knowledge creation process from the start, as well as shared ownership of the later results.

In the security and citizenship case, we saw a lack of shared ownership, although there were financial relations. The program’s design and results were not sufficiently organized in a way that allowed the partners to experience the program and results as their own. In the Kenniswerkplaats case, shared ownership was realized in the sense that the participants recognized the analysis as reflecting their own experience. The ideas and insights produced by the research were considered the result of a common effort which would also prove valuable in the dialogue with the municipality or other relevant parties. Nevertheless, participants mostly expected researchers to voice them.

Both cases suggest an important distinction between two categories of partners/parties. In one category are the actors directly involved in the process of co-production, like the police appointed to research positions or the professionals and volunteers that acted as active participants in the Kenniswerkplaats. In the second category are actors that are not directly involved in co-production but are ‘only’ stakeholders in the issue at hand. Actors from the first category are more likely to capitalize directly on the knowledge produced or to be empowered by it because they will more easily recognize it as their own. For the second category of actors, the produced knowledge can also reveal to be enabling, because anchored in concrete experiences and dilemma’s from the practice at stakes, but extra steps will be required to bring this knowledge to the fore.

III Managing expectations

Pursuing strongly contextualised knowledge requires intensive involvement and time investment, from both non-academic parties and the academic researcher. In the tradition of Participative Action Research this is all but a novel insight. However, if socio-scientific research is to evolve into more engaged research, producing enabling knowledge on a larger scale, it will need to address this major challenge. The type of researcher involvement that would be required does not match the typical function of the academic scholar. Engaging seriously in the production of socially robust knowledge will require re-thinking the duties, responsibilities and forms of assessment connected with the work of social scientists. In that respect we see a growing concern – at least in the Netherlands – about the conditions of academic polices in relation to the societal demands for robust and relevant knowledge.

On the other hand there seems to be an overestimation of what social research can produce. An improvising society, in which no Big Stories (ideologies or philosophies of life) are dominant
anymore, depends very much on science as a direction indicator. There is the seduction to see the researcher as the ‘solutionist’. If nobody else knows what direction to head, the researcher could tell us where to go. Unfortunately, this is generally not the case. On the contrary, science can accompany the social dynamics and could sketch possible next steps in the crafting processes, but it cannot take the position of the decision maker. In the end, it comes down to politics, making decisions in an insecure and unpredictable context.
References


