

Change & continuity in social research

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Social research in the old days – pre-1978, pre-Thatcher, pre-SRA

- Shoulders of giants
- Cost too often trumping quality
- Deadly pursuit of the rapid (and vapid)
- Growth of academic ‘commercialism’
- Data untouched by human mind
- Gresham’s Law and the ratchet
- Government resistance to qualitative research

11 years of Thatcherism

All of the above

Plus: Rayner Review of government statistics

Denial of social science

Statistics used blatantly for spin

But: Grudging acceptance of qualitative research

Growth of SRA and start of 'professionalisation'

Govt antipathy gives way to data dependency

Rise and rise of robust institutions

- ONS and Departmental research units
- IRIs eg IFS, NIESR, NatCen, NFER, PSI
- URIs eg Cathie Marsh, ISER, CASE, IES, SPRU
- Think Tanks eg IPPR, Adam Smith, NEF, SMF
- Growth of prof org's eg SRA, ARCISS, GSR, ARMA, AcSS, ESRA
- Growth of journals eg EPOP, SIR, 21st Century

Role of 'continuous' surveys

- Birth cohorts: NCDS, BCS70, MCS
- Other cohorts: School-leavers, ELSA
- Panel Surveys: UKLHS, Whitehall Study
- Repeat x-sections: BES, BSA, BCS, HSE, FRS, IHS (incorporating LFS, GHS, Exp & Food, EHS)

Growth of comparative research

- European surveys: Eurobarometers, EVS, EU-SILC, PISA, ESS, SHARE, EES
- Other continents/global surveys: Asiabarometers, Latinobarometers, Africabarometers, WVS
- EC Framework Programmes discouraging British parochialism

So, massive consolidation in 30 years, but...

- Overall research standards still patchy
- Qualitative methods too often used for quantitative purposes, and vice versa
- Convenience sampling methods still thriving
- Questions too often untested
- Over-claiming still thrives
- Quantitative training still well below par