

# **Shifting practices in New Zealand Sociology**

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## Abstract

There is a widespread sense of unease in New Zealand sociology. This disquiet emerges in the day to day as hushed concerns over student numbers, furrowed brows at budget balances and squeamish stomachs over research outputs. General and pervasive, this sense of unease is linked to profound changes in the organisation, provision and practice of an academic sociology radically re-shaped by neoliberal policies in New Zealand higher education (Olsen, 2002). There is an apprehension that under current conditions, sociology is unable to maintain itself as an academic discipline in New Zealand (Crothers, 1999). Yet still, people continue to be employed as sociologists in academic institutions and new sociology programmes continue to emerge (Spoonely, 2005). Discomfit between a pervading sense of unease about sociology and life on the ground for academic sociologists merits further investigation. This article seeks to embark on such an investigation. Using a variety of information gathering strategies, this paper identifies key trends in the recent disciplinary practices of New Zealand sociology – to assess whether this unease is symptomatic of a discipline in demise or not – and concludes that sociology is maintaining itself as an academic discipline, but in new and as yet, unfamiliar ways.

## Introduction

Few academic sociologists publicly discuss the impact of recent changes on their everyday practices and working environments as sociologists. Take for instance the ‘Symposium on The State of New Zealand Sociology’ in volume 14 of the *New Zealand Journal of Sociology* (Beatson & Ojeili, 1999). Characterised by a ‘new positivity’ (McLennan, 1999,p.261), the various contributions focused overwhelmingly on sociology’s merit as an intellectual endeavour. These accounts are silent on the impact that changing academic realities have on everyday practices that also, and perhaps more tangibly, constitute sociology as an academic discipline. This issue is under intense scrutiny by scholars examining the impact of neoliberalism

and globalisation on higher education <sup>1</sup> and there is a significant pool of edited collections and monographs dedicated to the impact on NEW ZEALAND in particular (these include Curtis & Matthewman, 2005; Germov & McGee, 2005; Larner & Le Heron, 2003; Olssen, 2002/2004; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Peters, 1999; Peters & Roberts, 1999). Although not dealing with sociology directly, this literature is enlightening and productive: their interrogations of neoliberalism and globalisation reveal the contingency of current institutional and disciplinary practices in New Zealand higher education.

Much higher education writing rightly locates recent shifts in higher education policy perspectives and practices to the rise in neoliberal discourses (Olssen, 2002). There is widespread debate in the education literature, as elsewhere, over the best way to understand the impact of this turn to neoliberalism, its character, relationship with globalisation and ultimately ways in which it can be questioned (Slaughter, 1998). Michael Peters and Wendy Larner have made a significant contribution to post-structuralist discussions of this issue in various sole authored and collaborative works over the last decade. In their challenges to globalisation and neoliberal rhetoric, Peters & Roberts (1999) and Larner & Le Heron (2003) make particularly useful contributions to the discussion about the academic realities of sociology.

Peters and Roberts' (1999) analysis and critique of neoliberal policies in higher education operates at the macro level of policy domains. Employing their own term of 'multiple globalisations' (1999,p.58), they regard neoliberalism as a very specific policy discourse that has come to dominate government responses to the processes of globalisation. As the neoliberal free market approach represents only one paradigm among a range of possibilities, when applied to sociology, their account raises the possibility of multiple and potentially cross-cutting policy discourses informing academic institutional practices.

Larner and Le Heron's (2003) strategy is to focus on the contingency of these policy strategies. In their view, neoliberal policies are not a coherent political response to the exigencies of the global economy but a particular moment where

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<sup>1</sup> For instance much debate is conducted in key sociology, political economy and higher education journals including the *Journal of Education Policy*, *Continuum: Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations*, *Studies in Political Economy*, *McGill Journal of Education*, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *Current Sociology* and the *Electronic Journal of Sociology* to name but a few.

diverse political projects get tied together as ‘an ad hoc, post facto rationalisation in which connections are made across political projects that were initially quite discrete and even contradictory’ (Larner, Le Heron, & Lewis, in press). Higher education is marked by discrete and sometimes contradictory political projects that are also collections of located, ad hoc and contingent alignments between diverse actors who, significantly, can traverse the field in new and creative ways (Larner & Le Heron, 2003, p.103).

Although Peters & Roberts’ macro account stresses multiplicity and potentially cross-cutting institutional and disciplinary practices while Larner and Le Heron’s account draws attention to the contingency of current academic practices, when combined, their accounts characterise the contemporary New Zealand academic environment as multiple, contested and contingent fields of academic practice. This insight offers a particularly fruitful point of departure when extended to the constitutive practices of everyday domains of academic disciplines such as sociology. Their approach allows for the possibility that current unease and disjuncture within academic sociology is an articulation of the complexity, multiplicity and emergent possibilities of contemporary New Zealand higher education as a whole. Moreover, this uneasiness and disjuncture may point to a re-configuration and re-scaling rather than disintegration of academic practices. Still, the difficulty is knowing the tenor of everyday practices and whether they signal a disintegration or a re-configuration of academic sociology. Currently, the appropriate literature is unable to shed much light, as even the productive work characterised by Peters, Larner and Le Heron does no more than offer tentative implications about the effect of the current context upon the constitution of academic disciplines.

The re-calibration of academia is linked in profound ways to trans and interdisciplinary studies that Peters understands as ‘a kind of unravelling of the disciplinary purposes of the modern university’ (Peters, 1999,p.6). In a similar, yet perhaps less pessimistic tone, Larner focuses on the emergence of benchmarking as particular kinds of calculative practices that are ‘giving rise to new views of the university world and altering staff and student behaviours’ (Larner & Le Heron, 2003,p.103) that while remaining firmly linked to an overall reliance on calculative practices, is giving rise to a more process orientated approach and *eroding disciplinary orientations*’ (emphasis added Larner & Le Heron, 2003,p.112).

Given the radical transformation in the context of academic practice and in accordance with scholars elsewhere (for instance Bullen, Robb, & Kenway, 2004) Peters, Larner and Le Heron imply that that the future for academic disciplines such as sociology is decidedly shaky.

Despite an extensive literature search, it has not been possible to corroborate their assertion in relation to sociology. This warranted a deeper look into the messy actualities of sociology to gauge if these fears about academic disciplines are justified. This depends of an evaluation of past and current sociological practices in relation to a workable definition of sociology as a bona fide academic discipline.

According to Peters (1999, prefix) an academic discipline has three core characteristics: it has a sense of disciplinary identity that is articulated and replicated through teaching and research that focuses on the discipline; it has a distinct institutional location and it has external recognition as a distinct and autonomous body of knowledge and practices. Combined, these disciplinary markers constitute academic subjectivities as a professional synthesis of autonomy and responsibility over teaching and research practices that advance the discipline.

When considered this way, the discipline of sociology can be usefully characterised as the pursuit of sociological imagination through ongoing disputations over perspectives and thorough examinations of lived reality (McLennan, 1998,p.62; Timms, 1970,p.51). Accordingly, for sociology to be a bona fide academic discipline, sociologists should be engaging in everyday practices that advance the discipline through teaching and research which foster disciplinary identity, academic autonomy, and garner external recognition. If Peters, Larner and Le Heron's fears are valid then an examination of past and current sociology practices should reveal a slide away from teaching practices that replicate disciplinary identity, a loss of institutional location and external recognition.

A detailed account of the messy actualities of everyday academic sociology around the country was generated. The aim was to use a range of information sources to allow a composite picture of multiple practices and different strategies in place. Material was gathered in various ways. I consulted academic journals, books and conference papers that discuss the practices of New Zealand sociology along with historical and current course outlines from personal teaching files. The internet was used to source University Calendar entries for the eight universities that offer programmes and courses in sociology. These are University of Auckland (Auckland),

Auckland University of Technology (AUT), University of Canterbury (Canterbury), University of Lincoln (Lincoln), Massey University (Massey), University of Otago (Otago), Victoria University Wellington (Victoria) and University of Waikato (Waikato). Departmental and individual course descriptions were also accessed virtually. Past and present Heads of School or Department were contacted via email and asked about current practices and contextual reasons for change. Some conversations were had with past and current academic sociologists round the country either face to face or via telephone. This information was gathered over an 18 month period up to July 2006.

The material gathered is not claimed to represent a full documentation of practices in sociology. Such an exercise would demand a more extensive research project. However, it is possible to at least discern distinct trends in the ways in which sociology articulates its disciplinary practice over the last twenty years.

### **Current trends in sociology.**

What follows is an account of the everyday strategies that constitute the disciplinary practices of NZA sociology. The first examined is the pedagogical approach in undergraduate and post graduate named social theory courses. Social theory pedagogy was examined because, as Harley (2005,p.346) among others notes, social theory papers are a distinctive and crucial pedagogical site as it is a place where students are taught about the history and disputes of Sociology - it is a site where disciplinary identity gets coherently and explicitly articulated.

### **Disciplinary identity**

Drawing from the various course prescriptions available in university calendars and websites, it is possible to discern a range of ways that disciplinary identity gets articulated in named social theory papers. This spans a focus on historical commentary, thematic disputes and current social issues and concerns.

At undergraduate 200 and 300 level papers, some, for instance Canterbury, Massey, Waikato and Otago articulate disciplinary identity in the form of commentaries that focus on the continuities and discontinuities in the historical development of sociological theory. Canterbury's Sociological Theory (Soci 240) traces sociological ideas from the Enlightenment to the present day, and uses the writings of key social theorists to explore and understand the linkages between their

ideas and their social/historical context. Massey (Turitea Campus) also articulates the disciplinary identity by way of historical commentary. The body of the Classical Social Thought (176.201) explores the work of early founding theorists Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel using recurrent themes of sociological methodology, social change and democracy and domination. Waikato's History of Sociological Thought (SOCY 204) casts a commentary of sociological thought from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth centuries in the context of historical and intellectual change with especial reference to Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Otago's Sociological Theory (SOCI 202) demonstrates the enduring relevance of concepts developed by key classical thinkers through links to key issues in contemporary social theory. Meanwhile Victoria uses the theme of society to introduce a range of sociological theories. Interpreting Society (Sosc 211) considers both classical and contemporary theories and their implications for researching and understanding social life. Victoria offers a stage one theory paper (SOSC111 Sociology: Foundations and Concepts) that covers Marx, Durkheim and Weber.

Other institutions, such as Auckland, AUT and Lincoln articulate disciplinary identity by applying a combination of classical and contemporary theorists to current social issues. For instance, Auckland's Theory and Society (Sociol 200) takes a practical and applied approach to show how a range of classical and contemporary theoretical approaches are being used to analyse and explain a range of contemporary social situations, from World Bank approaches to poverty reduction to New Zealand social policy and everyday health practices. AUT's Applied Social Theory (287-202) draws upon a range of theorists to examine and analyse current issues in New Zealand and internationally – particularly in relation to Asian and Pacific issues. Whereas Lincoln's Social Theory (SOCI 202) provides a detailed coverage of sociological concepts and theories and their application to New Zealand society in a global context.

Although Waikato, Otago and Lincoln do not offer graduate level named social theory papers, the others offer a diverse selection of approaches. Auckland's 'Advanced Problems in Sociological Theory' addresses contemporary developments and debates in the field of social theory using the theme 'After neoliberalism'. AUT's 'Advanced Social Theory' analyses contemporary global political economy and the contemporary characteristics of societies, groups and selves. 'Current Issues and Theory' offered through Massey (Turitea) takes sociological theory as a topic in its

own right, while 'Rethinking the Social' at Victoria develops an analysis of key themes and paradigms in sociological analysis. Canterbury's 'Social theory and the City' takes the historical transformation in the city as a means to assess a range of available social theories about the city.

The multiplicity of pedagogical strategies outlined above suggests a central characteristic of taught social theory papers in sociology is their heterogeneity. What may be surprising is this characteristic is not new. As long ago as 1970, D.W.G. Timms noted the considerable differences in teaching styles and content across sociology programmes. Timms' summary of the sociology programmes existent at the time (Victoria, Canterbury, Waikato and Auckland) stresses the divergence across courses at first, second and third level. To glance briefly at second and third year courses, all institutions offered a 'practical series on research methods where the emphasis is on techniques rather than on the more general question of the nature of sociological enquiry' (Timms, 1970,p.40). The substantive courses diverged markedly. Although Timms does not detail Auckland, Canterbury focused on General Sociology and Social Problems while Victoria focused on Social Institutions and Population studies, with Waikato offering Sociological Theory and Social Organisation. Given this longstanding diversity, there has been a radical transformation in the way that social theory gets taught. Timms drew attention to what he saw as a significant gap in the sociology curriculum:

It is perhaps inevitable that there should be notable gaps in the sociology programmes available in New Zealand. Probably the most serious substantive gap consists in the paucity of material on New Zealand society itself. With the exception of a handful of studies, concerned with small communities and demographic phenomena there is little local material available for incorporation into teaching programmes. (Timms, 1970,p.52)

In the review of current social theory papers there is a trend toward social theory courses focussed on and taught through contemporary problems in New Zealand society, or located in and through New Zealand issues. It has become more important than ever to highlight the significance of social theory through current and local lenses, be those Pacific, Asian or New Zealand. The perceived need for locally orientated approaches was reiterated (in emails) throughout all departments.

A current academic at Otago pointed out that 'the two theory papers are well supported, especially as our pedagogical approach is always to teach theory by integrating each theoretical approach within a case study from New Zealand society (e.g. Springbok tour, student loan scheme).' Another academic from Waikato repeats

the same point – that students like and want locally orientated critical theorising. ‘A lot depends on how the theory course is taught, for example the third year Modern Social Theory paper has inter alia a weekly workshop where students get to use theory to unpack current issues – this through group work, role play etc. This is seen as making theory work – instantiation - and is also enjoyed by the class.’

With the shift to local problem orientation comes an increased emphasis on social theory as process rather than social theory as canon. This is best illustrated through an example – here of using the Springbok Tour as a local issue wrought through social theory concepts. The Springbok Tour is an apocryphal moment in the socio-political construction of contemporary New Zealand national identity as ‘Springbok tour protesters represented a challenge to (and reincorporation of) traditional male values’ (Phillips, 1987,p.263) and as such is still very much alive in the national consciousness. As an event it was uniquely divisive of New Zealand society and is crucial to understanding New Zealand’s recent socio-political history, particularly in relation to post-colonialism and indigenous politics (McLean, 2000; Phillips, 1987,p. 115). This means that it is a crucial site to demonstrate key analytical techniques and concepts (such as ethnicity, gender and social conflict and national identity) and accurately analyse New Zealand’s social terrain. By using the tour to demonstrate and apply key themes and concepts, there is no guaranteed learning output in the form of detailed facts or information. Instead, students are given the tools and the problem to come up with their own synthesis and solution and in doing so, demonstrate their skills in self-directed learning.

Significant for sociology is the increasing attention to local issues and process orientated accounts of social theory. Acknowledgement of theoretical disputes is demonstrated by approaching social theory through current and local issues, as is the importance of sustained attention to the disciplined examination of contemporary lived realities of New Zealand. Disputes over competing explanations and an abiding concern to examine lived realities remain central characteristics of the current mix of social theory pedagogy. Taken nationally, sociology has the demonstrable capacity to communicate the core tenets of sociology’s disciplinary identity all be it through markedly different pedagogical styles. From that it can be said that sociology has retained its capacity to replicate its disciplinary identity.

## **Institutional location**

The continued capacity for social theory pedagogy to communicate disciplinary identity to students is not enough to get a sense of whether sociology is maintained as an academic discipline throughout recent institutional transformations. Following Peters (1999), it is also necessary to gauge the ability of sociology to claim a distinct institutional location through these tumultuous times. This can be translated into two aspects - one is the generic location of sociology within the tertiary education system and involves charting any significant relocation or disassembly of the discipline through recent decades. The second is autonomy over the organisation of the majors. Given their broad institutional location, do sociologists have the academic autonomy to set the conditions of their major, how have they done this and have the infrastructural changes had an adverse effect on this autonomy?

The first task is to identify whereabouts in the tertiary education system sociology first emerged. Sociology, since its first appearance in NZ, has been located within the university system. The first sociology papers were offered as part of a Diploma in Social Science through the federally constituted University of New Zealand in 1922 (Timms, 1970,p.33). However, the status of sociology as an academically recognised discipline within the university system was hard won. Although the first sociology courses were available by 1922 (Timms, 1970,p.33) it was only in the late 1960 and early 1970s that sociology achieved a more permanent footing within the academic world and appeared 'en route to academic respectability' (Timms, 1970,p.33). Six sociology departments were set up in the early 70s (Auckland, Victoria, Canterbury, Massey, Lincoln, Waikato). The slow expansion of the discipline within the national university curriculum continues. Currently eight institutions present courses in the named discipline of sociology. Of these eight, five offer majors in Sociology (Auckland, Canterbury, Massey, Otago, Victoria), while the balance (AUT, Lincoln, Waikato) offer sociology papers as part of a Social Science major. Over the last decade there has been an expansion in the academic recognition of sociology as a bona fide academic discipline - Otago and AUT have recently begun to offer sociology papers and Otago established a major in sociology as recently as 2002.

Even though the recent deregulation of tertiary provision has led to an expansion in the type of education providers (Scott & Scott, 2005) no sociology majors are offered in any of the other non-university tertiary education providers that

can tender degrees and certificates. Yet, there is at least a visible presence of sociological concerns within the broad array of offerings. For instance, sociology concerns are incorporated in the Certificate in Social Services at UNITEC; the Certificate in Social Services and Diploma in Social work (Manukau Institute of Technology); the Foundation Certificates in Nursing, Recreation and Sport, Applied Social Science, the B.A. in Nursing, and a Bachelor of Applied Social Science at EIT; Whiriteia's the Community Services Certificate, Foundation in Education and Introduction to Health Sciences; the BA Social Sciences Major at the Open Polytechnic and finally the Southern Institute of Technology's National Certificate in Social Services and Certificate in Health and Childcare. Sociology is also present as a minor in many other academic programmes within the university system. For instance, at Canterbury, many students are able to take sociology papers toward a major in most other disciplines offered in the College of Arts. These currently include but are not exhausted by majors in Anthropology, Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, History, Maori Studies, Social Work, Political Science and Religious Studies (University of Canterbury Registrar, 2006).

Despite the teaching of some sociology in a broad array of Certificate and Diploma courses and many other university degree offerings, this does not represent a significant shift in sociology's institutional location. The spread of this influence is in a minor register. This is because sociology remains subaltern to other pedagogical agendas of alternative academic and professional practice curricula.

In brief, sociology gained a distinct institutional location within the New Zealand university system in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and has experienced slow growth though stable institutional location. This signals the continued consolidation of sociology as a discipline within the New Zealand university system as distinct from either interdisciplinary dilution or dissemination into the broader system of tertiary education providers.

Academics have long experienced a high degree of autonomy in their university careers. A means to gauge distinct institutional location is through the autonomy of sociologists to constitute majors in sociology within the specific universities. This can be gauged through institutional permission to have autonomy over the curriculum progression in their majors.

Sociologists, alongside other academics, have experienced a transformation in the practice of autonomy over recent decades. Although a mix of major and minor

offerings in sociology has existed since its inception in the 1920s, what has changed is the ways in which individual sociology degree programmes have constituted their majors. This point is corroborated through an account of the fortunes of social theory papers within the sociology curriculum.

My logic for following the fortunes of social theory papers within the curriculum is that it is important to know the status of social theory papers within this modular system. This is because knowing whether they are compulsory or not is a way to gauge whether disciplinary identity is being actively addressed in and through the official, institutionally recognised curriculum associated with the named sociology degree. The autonomy to set the major requirements at departmental level means that academics are able to build progression across their whole degree curriculum. This autonomy is significant because the modular degree system (which all New Zealand universities use) does not require it. There are examples, especially in Australian and American degree majors, where all papers are interchangeable and there is no curriculum progression.

When we compare which majors are cored and de-cored (i.e. which social theory papers are compulsory or not) we get a sense that there are different ways to make up a sociology major in New Zealand. As suggested in [table # 1](#) below, social theory is offered in a mix of ways – at second, third and graduate levels, at second and graduate, or only at undergraduate.

(\*\* insert table 1. here)

Some institutions (Victoria, Canterbury and Auckland) have removed compulsory courses in the major, while others (AUT, Lincoln, Massey, Otago and Waikato) retain social theory (and usually social methods) as compulsory components of a sociology major. When asked to recall reasons for de-coring majors, what emerges is a mix of strategies in response to localised contexts within which the degrees are offered. According to an email received from a former lecturer at Auckland, ‘one reason that the sociology programme de-cored was because of competition for sociology students from education, population health, and management and employment relations – all of whom were teaching sociology. Because we made them do theory (which they found hard) they just voted with their feet. They wanted to do sociology but on their own terms’. A former Head of School

from the same institution remarked ‘We “de-cored” in stages from the late eighties, in response to student grumbling and EFTS competition. The last bastion (a pass in SOCIOL 200 required for Sociology major) fell around 2002.’

In contrast, a current member of Massey recounted how, under the same external pressures, their departmental decision-making took a different direction: ‘Teaching social theory? As I see it the play off is between depth and extent. At Massey, we kept the major cored and built the compulsory courses around authorial accounts of classic schools of thought rather than personalities. We went for depth - for preparing students to do sociology well - the courses were a cumulative archive of insights, strategies and different ways to unpack problems through authorial accounts rather than problem orientated courses. But this kind of structure is difficult to maintain. I think most others have removed compulsion – they’ve gone for choice in the major, you might get the numbers but they’re light on preparation for doing sociology well. But, really, the biggest impact for teaching social theory was semesterisation. That made it really difficult to maintain the depth of engagement and time for writing to make our approach work well.’

The diversified fate of social theory papers in the various sociology majors demonstrates that academic sociologists have managed to maintain a high degree of academic autonomy over how majors are constituted. However, decisions to modify or not are made on the back of intense pressure to deal with the effects of a user pays system in tertiary education.

Sociologists’ autonomy unfolds in an environment that has transformed the terms of responsibility. Academics are increasingly expected to apply managerial demands (predicated on market driven policies) to workaday practices. Market orientated policies have irresolutely intensified academic work. The growing focus on budgetary management has seen the emergence of just-in-time education. Work that can be contracted out is contracted out. Teaching responsibilities traditionally linked to an academic position are casualised as tutorial staff are called in to work on piecemeal (hourly) rates at the beginning of each course on an as needed basis, with no security of employment or security of facility use (like library card etc.). De-regulating tutorial staff means departments can trim costs to match their budgets and respond seemingly quickly and effectively to unpredictable fluctuations in student numbers. Budgetary management has also seen the emergence of rapidly escalating student:lecturer ratios. New Zealand universities have undergone radical restructuring

that has entailed a significant loss of permanent academic and general staff. Accordingly staff- student ratios have increased from 1:12.5 in 1979 to 1:20 by the late 1990s (Crozier, 2002,p.4).

Sociology has managed to retain a distinct disciplinary location: the influence of sociological approaches has spread through cognate disciplines within the university and (though subaltern) into the non-university tertiary education sector. The ways in which majors are constructed and the contours of sociology's presence in the tertiary education system suggests that even as distinct institutional locations are being maintained, the manner in which this is done has transformed in direct response to recent changes to the broader higher education sector. Academic sociologists are being responsabilised in new and unfamiliar ways.

### **Academic recognition**

Academic recognition, the last of Peters' conditions for disciplinary viability, remains to be examined. While sociology achieves a degree of academic recognition through its capacity to teach at university level, recognition of sociology in the national research culture and supporting agencies is also vital.

There are no think tanks and a scant handful of private social science research companies in New Zealand : the New Zealand state dominates tertiary education and research funding (Thorns, 2003,p.692). This means that as a discipline, sociology gains recognition through its relationships with government funding agencies and government Ministries.

Historically, support for sociologically orientated research has been minimalistic, particularly when compared to the sciences (Thorns, 2003,p. 693-694). Yet recently, sociological research has gained academic currency. Social research is now shaped through a social policy environment that is (potentially) post-neoliberal. Defined by Larner and Craig (2005,p.402) as a 'new era of joined up, inclusive governance characterised by relationships of collaboration, trust and above all partnership', it is associated with the growing significance of evidence based policy. This is the core strategy to develop accurate and effective policies that will foster inclusion in the knowledge society and assure New Zealand's performance on the global market (Maharey, 2003). Furthermore, this approach relies upon placing evidence based evaluation methods at the centre of policy activity and implementation. Funding bodies are eager to support collaborative projects and

sociologists have been keen to reciprocate. Examples include the “Local Partnerships and Governance” Research Group based in the Department of Sociology in Auckland, and “Constructive Conversations Korero Whakaaetanga: Biotechnologies, dialogue, and informed decision-making” based in Canterbury’s School of Sociology and Anthropology. As Thorns (2003,p.694) notes, the centrality of an evidence base to inclusion orientated policies marks a reawakening of interest in long term social analysis and with that, a re-recognition of sociologically orientated research.

While at the vanguard of collaborative and evidence based research, sociology is hamstrung by severely depleted education funding. ‘The research underpinning our discipline comes mostly from the vote education funding’, (which is research connected to a lecturing position rather than research funded over and above an academic salary) and remains meagre ‘relative to both other countries and other areas of scientific research’ (Thorns, 2003,p. 699,696). Sociology is experiencing a surge of recognition based on the collaborative and evidence based government policy agendas of the day, while at the same time the vast majority of sociological projects are undertaken in the straightened environment of vote research.

In summary, this section has sought to identify longstanding and newly emerging trends in the everyday practices of academic sociologists in Aotearoa-New Zealand. It has become apparent that there have been significant changes to the ways in which everyday sociology gets done. There is increasing attention to local issues and process orientated accounts of social theory; there has been a significant transformation in the responsibilities of academic autonomy; there is a surge in sociology’s academic recognition albeit in a strictly defined form. Now that there is some sense of what the trends are in current academic practice, some comments on Peters, Larner and Le Herons premonitions can be offered.

Peters prognosis for current times is that the underlying market logic does effectively shape academic practice and that this links to an ‘unravelling of disciplinary purposes’ (Peters, 1999,p.6). Agreeing with the profound impact of recent transformations, Larner and Le Heron presage new sites of intervention, re-designed curriculum and new forms of collaboration that are ‘eroding disciplinary orientations’ (Larner & Le Heron, 2003,p.112). Market logic does effectively shape academic practice, and new sites of intervention, re-designed curricula and new forms of research collaboration abound. This has been seen in the increasing need for academic practitioners to recognise and respond to student numbers as they rework

the courses that emplace sociology's disciplinary identity in emergent scholars, construct cored or de-cored majors, and develop new collaboratively defined research projects. Yet, given its undeniable re-orientation, it is still legitimate to claim that sociology is sustained as a bona fide academic discipline. It continues to demonstrate disciplinary identity, independent institutional location and academic recognition. How then to respond to Peters, Lerner and Le Hood's projections? One way is to examine the new academic subjectivities that are wrought. The striking feature is that the tenets of academic life - of autonomy over and responsibility for one's discipline - remain. What has changed is the ways in which this autonomy and responsibility is achieved. Academic autonomy and responsibility for sociology is demonstrated through rather than eroded by the turn to locally orientated teaching, multiple curriculum strategies and collaborative research. On sociology's account, rather than being unravelled and eroded, disciplinary orientation and purpose are being re-calibrated as they are linked to everyday experiences of tension, conflict and incompatible demands. More importantly, this sense of unease can be taken to articulate multiple and newly emerging strategies of disciplinary replication. Sociology practitioners have and continue to be constructive and inventive in the ways they traverse the field of academic sociology.

## **Conclusion**

There has been significant change in the institutional environment within which academic sociology exists in New Zealand. However, it is possible to suggest that, sociology's response to these changes gives a clear sense of continuing practices that foster disciplinary identity, that sociology's distinctive institutional location is being maintained and that it is experiencing a moment in the sun of academic recognition. These trends are significant because they indicate the specific ways in which the shift to neoliberal policies in higher education has impacted upon the discipline of sociology. Current unease may be symptomatic of re-calibrations rather than the demise of academic sociology in New Zealand. Current times in sociology suggest higher education in New Zealand is a highly contested terrain where critically effective permutations of and alternatives to neoliberal projects are emerging.

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Table for inclusion

Institution/named social theory papers	200	300	Graduate	Compulsory for major	Compulsion removed	Semesterised
Auckland	√		√		2002	1982
AUT	√		√	√		2000
Canterbury	√	√	√		2000	2000
Lincoln	√			√		1980
MASSEY	√	√	√	√		1996
Otago	√	√		√		2002
VICTORIA	√		√		2001	2001
Waikato	√	√		√		2000

Figure1. Table of institutions offering names social theory papers, at what level, whether under compulsion for a major in sociology ands when semesterised. Table compiled by Ruth McManus May 2006.