



## An innovative space for a new kind of dialogue

Under the aegis of UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations Programme (MOST), the **International Forum on the Social Science – Policy Nexus**, which will be held in Argentina and in Uruguay from February 20 to 24 2006, will break new ground in connecting social science research to policy. The Forum, **organized in conjunction with the Governments of Argentina and Uruguay, and with the support of a wide range of academic, policy, and NGO partners**, offers an innovative space for a new kind of dialogue, bringing together social science and policy in the search for a common language and shared terms of engagement.

The Forum will address contemporary transformations and the challenges they imply for social science and for policy across all the scales at which they operate: local, national, regional, and global. **By including in its programme a wide range of different formats, the Forum exemplifies the need to rethink the spaces in which the social science – policy interaction plays out.** Alongside plenary sessions and closed consultation meetings, workshops convened in response to an open call for papers and a global online consultation exercise will ensure wide participation and effective dissemination of the Forum's work.

**The International Forum on the Social Science – Policy Nexus is not just a one-off event.** It kick-starts a process that will be taken forward by the networks and activities that emerge from it, with the aim, ultimately, of reshaping the linkage between social science research and social policy. The challenges of global society far exceed social science, but without social science they simply cannot be met.

## Rigorous research, effective policy

The first truly global society in human history faces major challenges that bring its character, its democratic potential, and its very survival into play. **Yet at precisely the moment when enhanced capacities for action are needed, there is a lack of confidence in our knowledge of the challenges we face and in our ability to respond.** Chaotic urbanization, new pandemics, unruly globalization, mass poverty and hunger – can we simply watch fatalistically, as if we lacked the knowledge to understand why and the capacity to achieve change?

To answer “no” is a **challenge for policy and, inseparably, for the social sciences.** Only rigorous analysis of social dynamics can equip policy-makers, or those in civil society who aspire to shape policy, with the means to ascertain why well-intentioned reforms may fail, what might be the effect of proposed action, and how socially desirable goals might best be achieved. As for the absence of analytical rigour, it leaves the field open for prejudice, dogma, and spurious “common sense”.

Yet the problem is not intractable. While social scientists and policy makers ask different questions, operate on different timescales, and are judged by different criteria, they relate to the same society. **The knowledge that social science seeks is precisely the knowledge that policy needs** in order to be effective and democratically accountable.

The goal of UNESCO's MOST Programme is to bridge the gap between social science and policy, by making policy concerns meaningful in social science terms and the knowledge produced by social science meaningful in policy terms. This calls for new forms of translation – and innovative spaces to make them possible.

**A programme developed on the basis of wide consultation, including an open call for proposals, under the supervision of a broadly inclusive International Steering Committee**

- **Plenary sessions** with **high-profile keynote speakers**, which will convene in Buenos Aires on February 20 and 24 2006.
- **Workshops** will be convened by academics, activists and policy-makers from around the world in response to an open call for papers. The workshops, held on February 21, 22 and 23, will be grouped into **five thematic streams** meeting in **four cities**: “social policies” (Buenos Aires), “global issues and dynamics” (Buenos Aires), “migration” (Córdoba), “regional integration” (Montevideo), and “urban policies and decentralization” (Rosario).
- **Closed consultation meetings** will facilitate liaison between the key operators at the policy-research interface.
- **Contributions will be solicited online** from participants unable to attend the events in Argentina and Uruguay and reported on at the Forum.
- **Documents and resources** will be available online before, during and after the Forum at [www.unesco.org/shs/ifsp](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ifsp).