

## Social Science Soapbox

On Thursday 28 May, *as part of LSE Research Festival 2015*, LSE researchers took to the soapbox to discuss the 'big questions' of their research with the visiting public. Four researchers from various departments across the school took part in this innovative and exciting event!



It can often be quite a challenge for a researcher to boil down the core concepts of their research into a three hundred word abstract, even more so to reduce it to a single provocative question of just a few words! That's exactly what LSE Research Festival asked four brave researchers to attempt; before debating the answers to these 'big questions' quite literally from a soapbox!



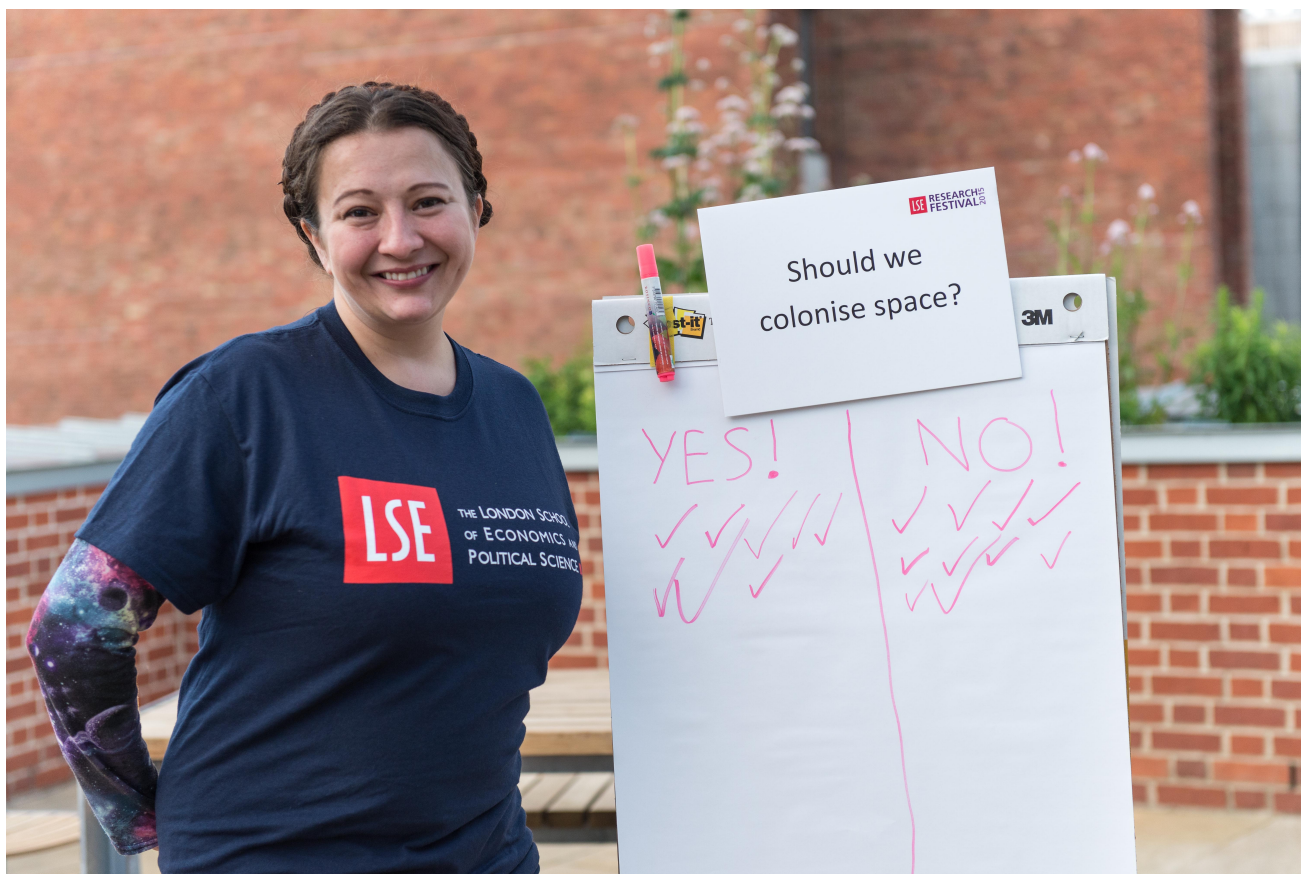
The event was held as the closing event of LSE Research Festival 2015 in partnership with the LSESU's PhD Week. Participating researchers were given prior training in public engagement from an external practitioner before taking on the challenge of debating with the public. The idea was to encourage two-way communication between researchers and visitors, and that was certainly the case throughout the evening. Many of our researchers were presented with new provocative questions to think about by the end of the night!







Four researchers from across LSE took part in the soapbox event, spanning different disciplines of social science research. Dr Jill Stuart from the department of Government started the evening by asking ‘Should we colonise space?’ Her research focuses primarily on the law, theory, and politics of outer space, the high seas, and Antarctica. The final vote proved to be a close call, with just a few more visitors believing humanity should stay put on Earth than begin to settle the stars.



Next up, Dr Ligia Madeira of the Department of Social Policy. Ligia posed the question ‘Can the judiciary ever be impartial?’ with reference to her work on the judiciary in the Brazilian legal system. There was no doubt in the public’s mind about this one, with impartiality being seen as virtually impossible in the public vote!







Dr Clara Fischer from the LSE Gender Institute began the second half of the soapbox by discussing her research, using the example of the women held in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries

to look at the use of shame in dealing with unwanted populations. Her question 'Is it bad to feel shame?' promoted mixed opinions from the voting public!



Finally Anthony Cilluffo, a General Course student from the Department of Economics, braved the soapbox to present work done by the LSESU Economics Society Research Group. His question, 'Is there a place for the poor at LSE?' discussed the societies recent findings regarding the socio-economic diversity of students at the school. There were lots of opinions from the public on this one!



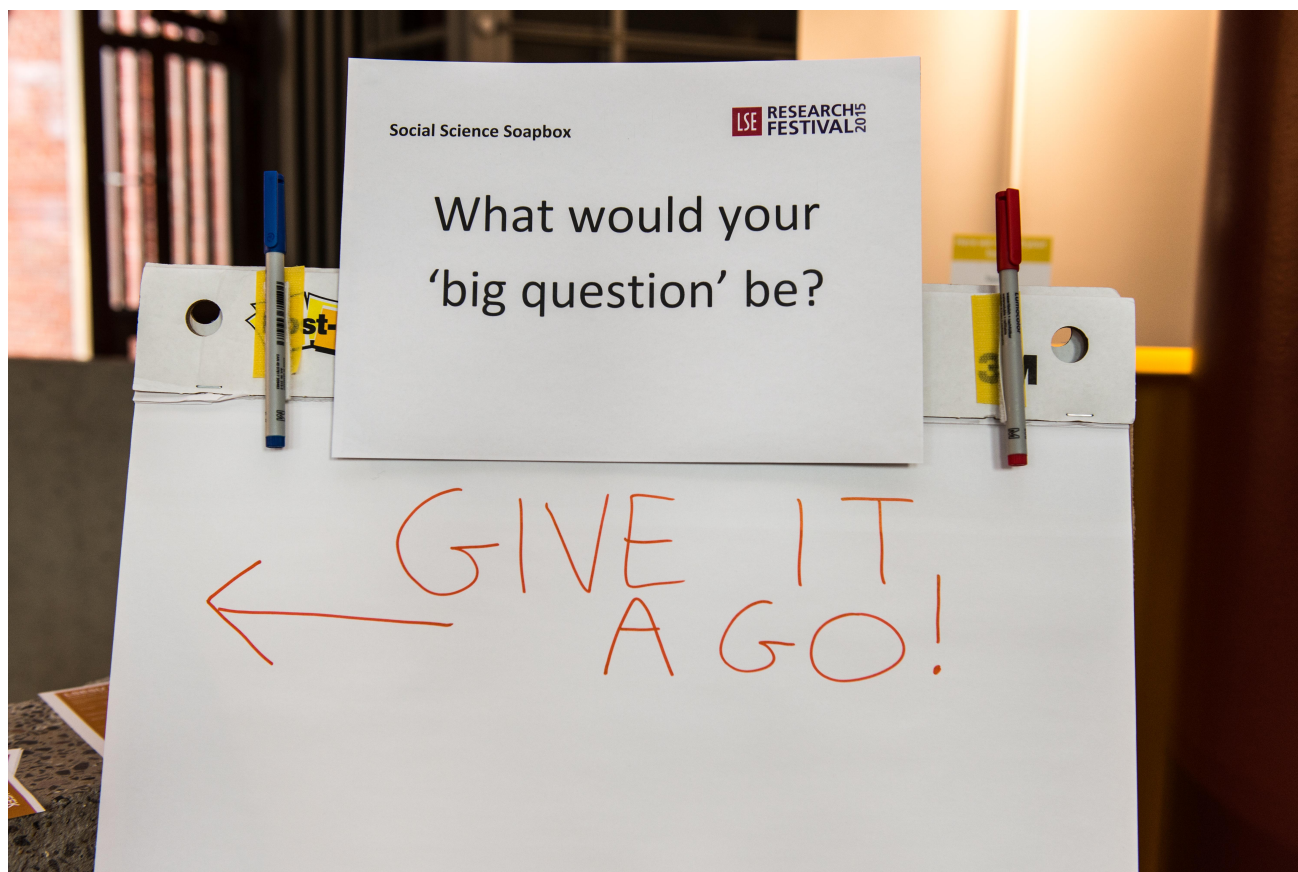




Finally the public were asked to have their say and pose 'big questions' of their own that they would like to see discussed at future events. These included '*Is there such a thing as a benevolent*'



*dictator?', 'Is climate change a moral issue?' and 'Should the NHS pay to treat a smoker with cancer?' It seems that there is plenty of scope for discussion at the next soapbox!*



*A huge thank you to everyone who took part in the soapbox event. Social Science Soapbox was co-hosted by LSE Research Festival and LSESU. You can find out more about LSE Research Festival's other events by subscribing to this blog, [visiting our website](#), or following us on Twitter [@LSEResearchFest](#).*

*Event photography credited to Catarina Heeckt.*

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