

## Putting the T in Sociology

*This first in a series of blogs posts on the theme of **Why Sociology?** is from **Mira Buerger**, an MSc student in the Department of Sociology at LSE.*



I study sociology. And I did and will work in the business world. For many people this sounds like an oxymoron. But sociology provides me what is so often demanded by today's recruiters: T shaped expertise. Both **IBM** and Ideo's CEO **Tim Brown** called for the T-shaped employees already back in 2010.

I personally love sociology for its creative, sometimes mind-twisting theory and for the curious insights in everyday life it offers, which make me understand why I dislike the new craze for gin connoisseurship but somehow still find myself holding a glass of gin and tonic with a fancy cucumber slice while standing in a craft distillery pop up store in Dalston, London. This knowledge is not getting you a job, they say. This is not business-relevant, they say. It is, actually! Because this is part of the T, the T in sociology.

The horizontal stroke of the T is often described as the ability to empathetically collaborate with people from other fields and to be a constructive part of a creative, interdisciplinary team. Empathy is seen in this context as the ability to step in someone else's shoes, to adapt to other skills, and to explore problems from different perspectives.

What sounds like a natural given gift can be learned: sociology is a great trainer of empathy. Plus, it provides me with an analytical lense towards the world. Sociology = Empathy + Critical Analysis.

This critical analysis applies to a horizontal breadth, enabling sociological scholars to examine social phenomena in diverse fields ranging from vaccination to shopping malls, power plants and finance, the art of baking, algorithms or time. Within these fields, sociology enables to grasp the complexity of a situation, to realise that there is never the ONE truth but multiple realities and to create compelling solutions for diverse problems. After all, the solutions are most often found outside the field in which the problem arose. 'Think out of the box!' they say. That is intrinsically sociological thinking. It's this generalist perspective that I can put on like sunglasses to every single topic I come across, from sitting at the dinner table to a discussion in parliament. That is not to say that there are no other nice pairs of sunglasses out there that provide another view on the

world. Sociology is just the one pair I cherish since many summers and that just gives me this special colouring I like so much.

Then there is the vertical stroke of the T. It refers to depth of a specific skill and expertise. This can be found in the sociological specification in on social field to reveal multiple causes, interdependencies and future scenarios. Depending on the topic focus of a sociological scholar, we can present multidimensional causes and deep rooting relationships which explain why banks but not Greece are too big to fail, we investigate how technology is shaped by social relations and how it shapes us, and we tell you why everyone stares at the digital numbers in the elevator as if there is going to happen something unexpected. And don't get me even started on the deep vertical skills of research methods sociologist have to offer.

More than ever, generalist analytic skills are necessary for today's business world because former distinct fields of expertise become more and more intertwined; democracy and finance, health and technology, consumption and politics, business negotiation and culture. This comes to show in product design, customer and client relation or business strategies and we sociologist can pull strings together to make sense of the messy interconnectedness of today's world.

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