



SOCIALAB – A CENSUS-BASED SIMULATION TOOL FOR PUBLIC POLICY INQUIRY

A Conversation with Professor Peter Davis

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In most settings it is neither practical nor ethical to conduct large-scale experiments in public policy with standard methodologies. One alternative for the ex-ante testing of policy options is to use simulation, a prime contemporary example being climate change projections. A tool - SocialLab - was developed for the counterfactual modelling of public policy drawing on longitudinal data from the New Zealand census and using microsimulation techniques. Five-yearly longitudinal census data for the period 1981-2006 was used to estimate an equation-based socio-demographic model organised around the life course and a social determinants framework. In illustration, a series of public policy counterfactuals was tested as a proof of concept. While the results are by no means dramatic, SocialLab potentially provides an open-source tool for deliberative inquiry in public policy development.

This seminar draws on a monograph co-authored with Roy Lay-Yee, *Modelling Societal Change*, soon to be published by Springer in the series *Computational Social Sciences*.



Join us to discuss the implications of this innovative tool with Peter Davis, Honorary Professor in the Department of Statistics and Emeritus Professor in Population Health and Social Science, at the University of Auckland. Earlier in his career, he was the founding director of the Centre of Methods and Policy Application in the Social Sciences in the Faculty of Arts, and before that a health and applied sociologist in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences. His main interests have been in policy, research methods, and quantitative techniques and research design. He has Master's degrees in Sociology and in Statistics from the London School of Economics and a PhD in health sociology from Auckland. For a decade he was Senior Editor, *Health Policy, at Social Science and Medicine*. He held a James Cook Fellowship from the Royal Society of New Zealand, 2015-2017, from which his book with Roy Lay-Yee *Modelling Societal Change* is drawn.

We will welcome UNRISD Senior Research Coordinator, Dr Ilcheong Yi as a commentator for this conversation, which will be moderated by Dr Michaela Told, Deputy Director, Global Health Centre, the Graduate Institute