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# Interview with Professor Hilary Land

## Part 5: on lessons learnt

**Okay. So is there anything that you think could have been done differently in the whole process that might have, anything that you kind of learnt from it in terms of...?**

Well, I think, I can see why Peter wanted to ask so many questions, but I think if you're going to collect that amount of data you've got to be much clearer about how on earth you're going to manage that amount of data. Because I think the study would have had a lot more impact if it could have been published within two or three years of the fieldwork finishing, rather than what, 12 years later, 10 years later. I do think that's a pity, that it inevitably took so long, and they hadn't really, knowing, well they should have known they were going to collect so much data, they should have thought more carefully about how they were going to fund the analysis, because it was clear the money was running out.

I mean I remember we had a meeting with Joseph Rowntree and I got the feeling from that meeting that if they had actually put together a proposal for extending the grant, they might well have given it, but instead Brian and Peter went to that meeting feeling very defensive and kind of assured them that they'd got, yeah, no, no, they were going to complete. And my memory, I could be wrong, but my memory of that meeting was it was a missed opportunity, that actually Rowntree were not totally opposed to giving more money. But I don't know what, I don't know who else would have been at that meeting actually, I think, I don't know who you'd ask because I don't think there was anyone else, I don't think John Veit-Wilson was at that, and Dennis and Brian and Peter are no longer with us, so I don't know who you could ask. But that was my, I remember coming away from one of those meetings when the money was running out feeling god, what a pity they didn't actually, they hadn't sat down and made a good case for an extension.

So one of the, well I've never done an interview survey since, I rather sit in the library and read the, analyse the policy, you've got more control over your data then, but, or talk to people involved with policy. Certainly if I was going to do another study, I would, on the basis of the poverty survey, I would make sure

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that I did not ask so many questions that you just had to think very hard about how on earth you were going to analyse the data. But of course today it's much easier with computers, you know, it is simpler, but even so I think they should have thought about that more carefully. But I suspect part of the reason they didn't was because again they kind of got the go ahead almost before they were thoroughly prepared for it if you see what I mean, so kind of grew like topsy.

**Is that why it took the ten years then to publish the book, because it just turned to...?**

Well they ran out of money. I mean I left at the end of '68 and there was no more money. The grant had come to an end. So it was a question of Peter must have found money to involve Alan Walker, he must have got paid to do some of it, I'd have thought, but I think he was a young lecturer at Essex then, so I guess in those days you didn't necessarily have to have a grant to do research or to write something if you had time to do it. I've hardly had any grants in my academic career, because I just had, fortunately I had time. So I guess Peter must have got bits and pieces.

I guess Alan Walker would be able to tell you how they funded it, but basically there was no more money from Joseph Rowntree and I imagine they got bits and pieces of grants from here and there possibly to fund particular bits, I don't know. But that's why it took 10 years, it was because they didn't have anybody who was really working, they didn't have a little team that was working on the analysis full time. You know, if they had had, it could have been published within what, two or three years I guess, and it might have had, coming, it would have coincided perhaps with the Labour government coming in again in '74 or whenever and people like Barbara Castle I think would have been very sympathetic to some of the issues that they were raising.

So, you know, and Peter's always had, always juggling 1,000 balls in the air at the same time, so I mean he wasn't working on it full time. He was, he'd got a big department, he was head of department at some point, he was Pro-Vice-Chancellor at another time, so I mean he had, quite apart from all his other interests, he had other university responsibilities at Essex, so he certainly couldn't devote all of his time to it anyway. So I do, I mean it certainly taught me that if you're going to do that kind of study, you have to think it through right the way through to the end and make sure that you don't just front load the grant, you

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make sure that you cover enough for the later stages, because that's absolutely crucial.

**Thank you. Anything else you can think, any other lessons?**

I'm sure I'll think of things afterwards. No, as I say, I mean I was very lucky in that I learnt a lot, you know, I was exposed to a whole variety of sort of different sort of aspects of doing survey work, including having to do some of it myself, which was always very useful, and also seeing how in certain circumstances at least, really good evidence produced by social scientists can make a difference, but other things, the broader context is also important and the evidence can also be ignored of course, so you know, timing is important. But it kind of gave one a little bit of confidence that if you do have some really solid evidence for an issue that needs attention...

If you can get enough people, enough key groups sort of behind you as it were, you, it's ammunition basically. I think research is ammunition and it's just one form of ammunition, you know, and you just have to keep on. So I suppose in that sense it was, I learnt a lot. And the other thing was because we didn't get the sample for my pilot as quickly as we'd hoped, I had a chance to read Eleanor Rathbone, and you know, so she showed me that as a feminist you could push policy right the way through government if you carried on long enough. I mean she started campaigning, like she started the Family Endowment Society in 1918, and it was almost 30 years before the first family allowance was paid. But she never gave up. You know, and she too used, she used other people's research and she sort of banged on about it, very tiresome according to other MPs but nevertheless, you're in for a long haul, I suppose, is one of the things I learnt when it comes to policy change. Things don't often happen quickly. Or only if the circumstances over which you have no control are favourable.