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EULAKS

Connecting Socio-Economic Research on the Dynamics of the Knowledge Society in the European Union and Latin American and Caribbean Countries
Grant agreement no.: 217190

Ongoing project

SUMMARY

Objectives of the research (WP1)

WP1 of the EULAKS project is designed to propose policy-oriented analysis that are to be used as information basis of the other Work Packages and to develop policy recommendations for strengthening the international co-operation in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The analytical tasks are designed at different levels:

- A survey of trends and patterns in SSH cooperation between the EU and LAC (Task 1.1)
- A survey of the role of the SSH in the steering, designing, implementing and monitoring of science, technology and innovation (STI) policies in the EU and LAC (Task 1.2)
- A micro-level analysis of scientific communities and collaborative EU-LAC research networks (Task 1.3)

In this policy brief we will focus on first results of Task 1.2.

Scientific approach / methodology

For Task 1.1 an online survey was recently sent out to over 10.000 researchers who are/were engaged in EU-LAC scientific cooperation. An elaborate analysis of the survey results will be made available to the public at the end of the project.

For Task 1.2, in addition to identifying and characterizing SSH research groups on innovation in LAC and EU countries, a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with researchers and policy makers of both regions is being carried out. A theoretical basis of the study lays the abundant



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New knowledge and/or European added value

literature dealing with that subject from a broader SSH perspective or in other specific fields or sectors (health, education, natural sciences, etc.).

Task 1.3 involves a bibliometric analysis of co-authorships in research in specific fields, a questionnaire-based survey on scientific networks, and case studies in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico.

Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors

As speaking for Task 1.2, preliminary results of the interviews show that it is especially interesting to observe the variety of answers concerning the main obstacles and difficulties for a better linkage between SSH research on innovation and Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policy making.

Performing influential research means breaking the routine of policy making and adding new knowledge and new concepts from new perspectives (including the Social Sciences). This means not only effecting particular policies from a research basis, but having a long lasting influence on a country's capacity to broaden its policy making horizon and improving the ways in which governments make decisions.

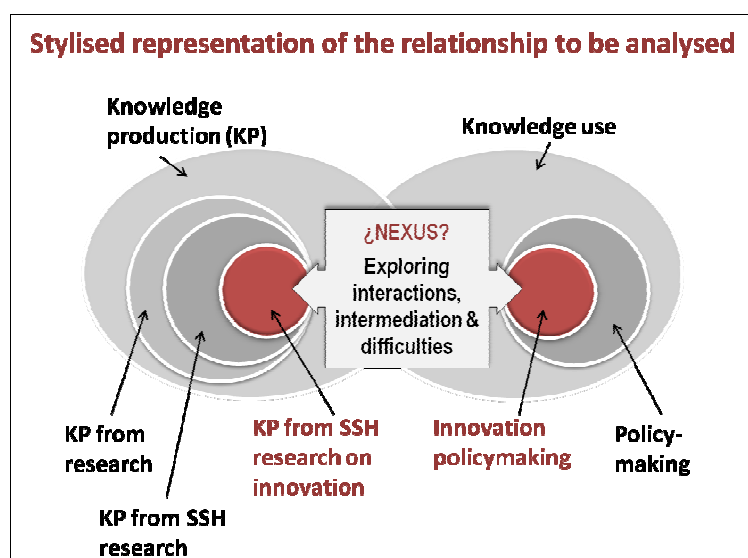
Research only gets valuable for policy making when it is translated into practice. The nexus between the socio-economic sciences and policy is a profoundly practical concern: Whether they realise it or not, policymakers need enhanced links between research (in particular socio-economic research) and policy because, in their absence, policies are unlikely to achieve their objectives. The challenge consists therefore in establishing a renewed basis for policy that takes account of its indispensable anchoring in rigorous social science knowledge.

Objectives of the research

Task 1.2 foresees to analyse the role and status of SSH in designing and implementing STI policies, considering the importance of the latter in contributing to the building of knowledge societies. The nexus between research and policymaking is admittedly complex and has been relatively little studied from a STI policy perspective. A better understanding of what is presently happening in this field, in LAC and the EU, should result in some concrete lessons on how to foster this nexus.

Scientific approach / methodology

Three decades ago the seminal work of Weiss (e.g., Weiss, 1979) distinguished three main uses of research: a) **instrumental** or problem solving, by providing direct inputs for policy design (quantitative and qualitative information); b) **symbolic** or legitimative, by confirming existing notions or supporting policy decisions; and c) **conceptual** or enlightenment, by improving people's knowledge, understanding and attitudes, or by challenging assumptions, and thereby eventually changing the way of thinking and looking at issues. In the latter case, the impacts are usually diffuse, subtle, diverse, long-term, and difficult to trace (Nutley et al., 2007). The following decades saw an upsurge of research for evidence-based policies while, at the same time, it became increasingly clear from empirical studies that using research is an interactive, iterative, and contextual, dynamic process.



There is no such thing as new knowledge being straightforwardly transferred from the research to the policymaking field. As Davies *et al.* (2008) conclude from their long-term work on this subject: "Terms such as knowledge transfer and knowledge translation misrepresent the uncertainties, complexities and contextually contingent ways in which knowledge is created and applied. ... we

New knowledge and European added value

suggest that 'knowledge interaction' might more appropriately describe the messy engagement of multiple players with diverse sources of knowledge. We also suggest that 'knowledge intermediation' begins to articulate some of the managed process by which knowledge interaction is promoted. Both of these terms, if combined with a suitably nuanced understanding of knowledge creation and use, could redress some of the misconceptions fostered by ideas of 'knowledge transfer'" (p. 190).

At this stage of the project - interviews are still being carried out - it is premature to bring forward any significant finding. However, from the first twenty interviews in LAC that have been processed, it is possible to recognize and illustrate from an 'innovation perspective' some features related to the above mentioned, abridged conceptual framework.

As a preliminary result of the interviews it is especially interesting to observe the variety of answers concerning the main **obstacles and difficulties for a better linkage** between SSH research on innovation and STI policy and instruments definition. We find the following ones particularly interesting:

- the complexity and political nature of decision processes (*"I think the main difficulty resides in the very nature of how political decisions are made. One thing is designing: researchers can do this. However moving from design to final approval entails the entire political lobby, the power struggle. We, as researchers, do not take part in this process, neither is it our responsibility to do so. ... We are convinced of the need to raise public awareness by promoting public debates and forums, otherwise projects and proposals wouldn't even reach a first round. But we don't know what can happen in the next stages, where the power game is what marks."*)
- the lack of effective public debates and social dialogues (*"Meeting and dialogue spaces emerge through mechanisms that are fundamentally inefficient in terms of information transmission"; "The big issue at stake is sitting other actors at the same table and building up collectively dynamic interrelations that generate actions towards innovation"*).
- a mismatch between supply and demand of SSH knowledge (*"STI decision takers show a low level of demand for knowledge created in the social sciences field, such as indicators, base studies, etc. The latter are not much used in the decision making process, they are classical products of a supply oriented system, information that was not demanded"*)
- the limited applicability of policy recommendations when they abstract from 'real life' conditions, among others with

respect to institutional restrictions (*"A majority of academicians dedicated to the study of innovation has a short-sighted vision of this phenomenon and lacks perception of the restrictions faced by policymakers. These include from very general factors, such as the relation between macro and innovation policy, to operational issues. ... In short, this is linked to a vision that is consolidating through time, of innovation as a specific field of knowledge. I believe this is having adverse effects because it results in researchers neglecting the real restrictions to the innovation phenomenon and making recommendations that are either very generic or very exhortative...."*)

- the lack of systematic retrieval of research projects already carried out, looking for clues that could help designing innovation policies or instruments (*"Nobody is really evaluating the scientific system to find out, for example, to what extent the ideas of some researchers can be a key to solve policy questions, to solve people's problems, to think about instruments that don't exist, etc."*)
- the lack of specialized staff in STI policy management (*"We don't have a staff of technical officers able to implement long term policies [in the country]. Those are the ones who should know about the local academic or technical production on STI, and propose different alternatives to the policymakers. There are a few of them, but they are usually badly trained"*).
- a tendency to concentrate innovation related research in Latin America on economic issues, and especially on the industrial sector.
- the need to translate the results of research projects into meaningful inputs for policymakers, a function that is often felt as being outside researchers' capacity. Explicit- or implicitly, interviewees expressed the idea that this function would be better performed by a type of brokers specialized in de-codifying what researchers do and find out, and in translating policymakers needs to the research sphere.
- an academic incentive regime almost exclusively oriented towards the production of papers, with no reward for 'problem solving'.
- timing of policy makers and researchers do not coincide (*"Urgencies of policy makers, who have limited time spans to produce results and develop policy documents, mean they have no time to take into account existing studies and go in greater depth in them. This is a fact; in our case it is absolutely real"*).
- the use of different 'languages' by researchers and

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policymakers.

Recently policy research became a big enterprise and many social scientists got active in studying economic and social processes and the impact of policy interventions. However, the success of policy research is not always so clear and frustrations spread since the 1970s over the low policy response to research findings.

Often, the reason why research findings are not recognized as a dominant resource for public policy making is that researchers and policy maker speak a different language. One concrete example can be drawn from our interviews, where researchers and policy makers have very different opinions on what they consider as the main inputs taken into account in STI policymaking in their country. The two most often mentioned inputs by researchers were "Personal knowledge and experience of the policy-makers" (75% of the interviewees) and "Working lines and financing of international organisations" (67%). On the policymakers' side, this second input was never mentioned. They privileged "Outcomes of deliberations between researchers and policy-makers" (83% of the interviewees, and always as a first or second option), "Studies and diagnostics of economic sectors, and their policy lessons" and, likewise researchers, "Personal knowledge and experience of the policy-makers". Only one researcher and two policymakers considered "Quantitative data obtained through surveys or similar" as an input worth mentioning.

Since the sample used is very limited indeed, it will be interesting to observe whether additional interviews confirm this difference in perception between researchers and policymakers concerning inputs presently used for STI policy design.

When asked if they intend influencing STI policy design, all researchers answered affirmatively. In general, they were able to identify a couple of studies of their group that had become at some point a reference in innovation related discussions, either in the academic or policy sphere. Many of these groups have also carried out studies 'on demand' or answered consultations from government bodies. However, overall, researchers' (spontaneous) comments on their possible ways of influencing policy usually referred (often implicitly) to the "conceptual or enlightenment" use of research rather to the instrumental one.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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Coordinator	Dirk Johann, Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI)
Consortium	<u>Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO)</u> <u>L'Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD)</u> <u>London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)</u> <u>Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM)</u> <u>Universidad de la República, Uruguay (UdelaR)</u> <u>Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento (UNGS)</u>
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Related websites	<u>www.zsi.at</u> , <u>www.flacso.edu.mx/</u> , <u>www.ird.fr</u> , <u>www.lse.ac.uk</u> , <u>www.xoc.uam.mx/</u> , <u>www.universidad.edu.uy</u> , <u>www.ungs.edu.ar/areas/in_idei/n/institute-of-industry</u>
For more information	eulaks@zsi.at