

SPS 3rd term workshop 2024 – 2025

Policy Perspectives in Research Impact

Dates and venue:

23 April 2025, 10.00-15.45, Seminar room 2

24 April 2025, 9.00-16.00, Seminar room 2

Supervising professor: Anton Hemerijck, Department of Political and Social Sciences, EUI,
anton.hemerijck@eui.eu

Organiser: Heta Pöyliö, Research Fellow, Department of Political and Social Sciences, EUI,
heta.poylio@eui.eu

Contact: Claudia.Fanti@eui.eu

Credits: 10

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Workshop description and objectives

A key element of high-quality social research today is the ability to create an impact outside the academic community. Hence, this course aims to develop the skills necessary to relate various research foci with policy perspectives, to distil complex research into accessible insights and to communicate this effectively to policymakers and other stakeholders. Participants will learn to recognise the societal contribution of their research, develop clear messages from their findings, write concise policy-focused texts, and engage with stakeholders in ways that can shape decision-making and maximise the impact of their research. The workshop is a 2-day intensive course where participants obtain knowledge of science-policy interactions and the role of knowledge in policy, and establish skills to identify and set goals for their research to influence societal issues, public discussions and policy-making.

Day 1 comprises presentations on different perspectives of policy-relevant research impact by academic researchers. These sessions reflect on the thinking about the role of policies and societal factors in workshop participants' research, how knowledge and research findings of social research can contribute to the related institutional factors in various settings, and how individual researchers can establish meaningful connections and dialogues with stakeholders.

Day 2 starts with a hands-on approach in learning skills to a) communicate about one's research clearly with a policy focus and b) use tools to express and distribute policy-relevant findings to non-scientific audiences. The training presents examples of policy-relevant communications and teaches how to write up the key messages of one's research with targeted goals and clarity. Particular tools and skills for writing policy-focused communication, such as policy briefs and blog posts, are practised with participants' research material. The workshop will finish with a panel discussion, bringing together professionals and experts from both research and policy. The panel discussion focuses on the myriad experiences of science-policy interactions, presenting success stories and challenges in reaching the mutual benefits of these interactions.

The workshop provides knowledge on research communication in social research, presents examples of good practices and enables to exercise tools to establish your goals in research impact with various audiences and stakeholders. The presenters and examples are drawn mainly from sociological and demographic research because establishing policy perspectives and creating policy impact may not be straightforwardly linked to one's research. However, anyone interested in the topic and learning more about increasing the societal impact of their research is welcome to the workshop.

By the end of the workshop, participants will

- Understand the societal and policy context related to your research and the role of scientific knowledge in policy-making.
- Have confidence and courage when speaking about your research to non-scientific audiences.
- Be able to communicate your research findings to various stakeholders clearly and concisely.
- Have skills to establish impactful science-policy dialogues and to understand the mutual benefits of these interactions

Course work and evaluation

The workshop is graded pass/fail. To obtain the credits, participants are required of

1. Active participation during the workshop
2. Submission of a one-page summary of your research to a non-scientific audience. Please send a draft of this one-pager to the organiser (heta.poylio@eui.eu) **before the workshop begins**. The pre-workshop document format is free, instructions for the final submission will follow during the workshop.
3. A short policy-focused text (for example, policy brief, blog post, op-ed) based on your own research with clearly defined aims, target audience and message. Instructions will be provided during the workshop.

Schedule

Wednesday 23 April 2025, 10.00-15.45

Seminar room 2, Badia

10-10.45 Introduction: Research beyond “Context matters” – bringing policy and impact into research work

Heta Pöyliö, Research Fellow, Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute

Research today requires communicating scientific knowledge to various audiences and establishing dialogues to create mutually beneficial impacts from research to policy and vice versa. The requirements from grant authorities, university strategies, public governments, etc., for researchers to increasingly be involved in shaping societal discussions have created a set of tasks as part of good research practice. Simultaneously, entangling clear and feasible policy messages from one’s findings may not be straightforward when the analysis focuses on micro-level phenomena. The start of the workshop challenges you to map the political context of your research and initiate thoughts on the policy relevance of your empirical findings that will follow with you and develop through the workshop into actionable strategies and your path to impact.

10.45-11.45 Working with the Uncertainty of Scientific Knowledge in Policy Engagement

Herman Van de Werfhorst, Professor of Sociology, Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute

Engaging with policy makers on the basis of scientific evidence brings a challenge to researchers regarding the certainty that policy makers desire, and the fundamental uncertainty of scientific knowledge. Which kinds of evidence are useful for policy? Does only strict causal evidence matter, or are there other sorts of evidence useful? Two main problems regarding causal evidence for policy making will be discussed: the risk of the false pretention of certainty, and the lack of theoretical development on mechanisms why empirical patterns exist. Based on many years of experience in policy engagement, in informal and formal ways, Van de Werfhorst will share his experiences in light of these themes, and discuss lessons to be learned for policy-engaged empirical scholars.

11.45-12 Break

12-13 Don’t do it alone - Fostering societal impact with institutional support and collaboration

Jani Erola, Professor of Sociology, Director of INVEST Flagship Research Centre, University of Turku

For a social scientist, having a societal impact is a particularly important indicator of success in research. In recent years, its importance has become much better understood and more openly required in small and large research projects. But how that should be accomplished? I argue that an individual researcher should not be expected to aim at social impact alone. Instead, research institutions should organise specialist support for it. On the other hand, researchers should still themselves play the active key role in such efforts, have the skills to use such services effectively and be ready to exhaust the opportunities that are opened for such an impact in policy preparation and public discussion, often suddenly and without warning.

13-14 Lunch break

14-15.30 Finding Your Voice in the Science-Policy Landscape: From Research to Impact

Daniela Vono de Vilhena, Deputy Executive Secretary of Population Europe & Project Coordinator at Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research

Vono de Vilhena has received the 2024 Outreach Award for Communication in Population Science from the European Association for Population Studies.

This session aims at empowering participants to navigate the science-policy interface with confidence and clarity. By focusing on three interconnected areas - effectively communicating research, fostering transdisciplinary dialogue with diverse stakeholders, and tackling the multifaceted journey toward policy impact – participants will be able to reflect on actionable strategies to amplify the reach and relevance of their scientific endeavours. It also aims at encouraging attendees to critically reflect on their strengths, values, and goals, equipping them with knowledge to craft personalized approaches that resonate in both scientific and policy domains.

15.30-15.45 Feedback of day 1 and instructions for day 2

Thursday 24 April 2025, 9.00-16.00

Seminar room 2, Badia

9-13 Researchers are increasingly expected to interact with society, but what does this mean in practice? How do you get started in communicating your research?

Milla Ikonen, Communication Specialist, INVEST Research Flagship Center, University of Turku

In this part of the workshop, we will discuss the different roles of a researcher as a societal commentator and influencer. We will consider how phenomena get onto the policy agenda and at what stages a researcher can influence the process. You will learn how to set clear objectives for your communication and impact work and how these affect the choice of target

groups, channels and message design. We will also explore communication tools such as policy briefs, blogs, social media, media releases and public events. You will get practice in identifying stakeholders and creating clear and engaging key messages.

13-14 Lunch break

14-16 Panel discussion on Science-Policy Dialogues: Experiences and Insights

Chair: Heta Pöyliö, Research Fellow, European University Institute

Panelists: Kaku Attah Damoah, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF Innocenti - Global Office of Research and Foresight

Valentina Di Stasio, Professor, Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute

Laura Rahm, Jean Monnet Fellow, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute

Cristina Santos, Policy Leader Fellow, School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute

This panel brings together a group of people from both policy and research to discuss the variety of experiences and expertise of science-policy interactions within their work. The topics relate to achievement and success, challenges and difficulties, and crucial skills in establishing, maintaining and succeeding in policy-focused communications. The chair will present some questions to the panel members, and workshop participants are encouraged to enquire about any questions raised during the workshop. The panel aims to provide tangible tools and knowledge to initiate junior scholars' work in policy-related research impact, and hence, the panel members consist of mid-career professionals and experts providing personal insights.

Reading list

Key readings

Cairney, P., & Oliver, K. (2020). How Should Academics Engage in Policymaking to Achieve Impact? *Political Studies Review*, 18(2), 228-244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929918807714>

Van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2022). Bringing in Theory Building and Social-Political Context to Understand and Reduce Inequality: A Commentary. *Socius*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221081703>

Vono de Vilhena, D. Edel, A. & Kobsda, C. (2024) Communico, ergo sum? Potential and pitfalls of knowledge exchange. In Bijak, J. (Ed) *From Uncertainty to Policy: A Guide to Migration Scenarios*, Edward Elgar. Pp 92-105. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035319800.00019>

Additional readings

Jackson, M. (2021). *Manifesto for a dream: inequality, constraint, and radical reform*. Stanford University Press.

Šucha, V. & Sienkiewicz, M. (Eds.) (2020) *Science for Policy Handbook*. Brussels: European Commission, Joint Research Center (JRC). Available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9780128225967/science-for-policy-handbook>