

How Should Social Sciences Relate to Public Policy?

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The Social Sciences and Policy

- Conflict between increasing knowledge/ understanding and specific policy focus?
- Having impact on policy cannot be a KPI for SS – but policy relevance one criterion
- And answering policy questions often moves out the knowledge frontier
 - and means really hard questions harder to dodge


The Researcher's Perspective

- Academic/University incentive system does not reward policy engagement
- Especially in a small country
- Policy implications throw-away at end of paper
- Disdain for messiness of policy world?
- Except where funding available!

The Policymaker's Perspective

- Different timescale
- Experts versus generalists
- Decisions have to be made on information available
- Disdain for unprofessional ivory-tower academics?
- Except where “cover” required!

SS Research and Funding

- What do SS need funding for?
 - Data, infrastructure, research teams
 - Mix of funding streams required
 - Focus on specific policy questions versus thematic
 - Harder in small country
 - EU context very helpful
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Conclusion

- Societal decisions get made willy-nilly
- Social scientists have an opportunity to influence debate if not (often) specific policy decisions
- Cannot be an obligation on individuals – but if research community not seen to be contributing