

MINUTES OF MEETING: IGLO Open - Towards a European Science for Policy (S4P) Ecosystem

Date:	5 th November 2024
Minutes taken by:	Lucie Münchová, Consultant for Education

1

On 5 November the CZELO office participated in the IGLO Open meeting focused on the topic of Science for Policy (S4P) Ecosystem. The meeting was organized by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency in Brussels (FFG) and during the meeting representatives of the European Commission, the Joint Research Centre, the Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology, and Innovation (FORWIT) and the Austrian Institute for Technology (AIT) discussed the current state of play, challenges and steps to take to support science for policy ecosystem.

Welcome and Introduction

FFG Austrian Research Promotion Agency

- The science for policy (S4P), meaning including science and scientific results while preparing and creating policy documents and strategies, is becoming one of the horizontal topics of the European Research Area, which is very good.
- On 21 November the Austrian European Research Area Symposium on Research management and science for policy will be held in Vienna.

Advancing the European Science4Policy ecosystem

DG RTD

- Scientific knowledge as a basis for policy making has been widely recognized, but still there are issues with its practical implementation.
- The European Commission (EC) has identified 3 main challenges (fragmentation of institutions, lack of capacities of individual people both in governments and researchers, governance of science policy interface) and based on these findings the Council published its Conclusions in December 2023 recognising the importance of the science for policy and giving the EC the mandate to act in this context. Since then, the EC has been focusing on strengthening the S4P ecosystem and encouraging networking.
- So far most scientists have to do policy work “on the side”, because it is not recognized as being of their everyday work, but informing the policy makers and contributing to policy updates should be one of the roles of researchers.
- DG RTD is trying to mainstream science for policy to the innovation policies and into the next ERA policy agenda, while also identifying synergies with all other relevant ERA actions regardless of the sector.
- DG RTD also created a Community of practice to mobilize resources, facilitate learning, and support creation of new structures.

European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC)

- JRC realized that to understand the whole S4P process there is a need to look at the governance, democracy and the overall picture on the national and EU levels – therefore they are now looking at how science can have a positive impact on democracy



- science gives policy makers accountability in the sense that they can explain why they do what they do, they can bring expert on board and science can help solve much more complicated challenges (thus addressing transparency and quality issues on the national level)
- also having better policies ultimately supports trust of citizens in governments (it is scientifically proven that citizens tend to trust governments more when they feel they made decisions based on science)
- JRC is also focusing on building capacities with the individual member states and it helps the member states to make further developments
- In the USA there is a decreasing trust in science, but in the EU the research shows, that citizens and societies in general still trust science and scientists a lot and they want them involved in the policy making.

Austria's path to enhancing evidence-based policymaking

FORWIT Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology, and Innovation

- In Austria currently there is an ongoing assessment of what kinds of policy advice from scientist exists, the FORWIT is mapping what kinds of advisory mechanisms already exist and it will be collecting experience from them and from their cooperation with policy makers.
- So far two observations can be made:
 - There are issues of terminology - it seems that “science for policy” is a quite new term, but it is tied into much older discussion on “expertise” which has very similar meaning, at the same time the word “ecosystem” implies that the purpose of S4P is to get all information and mechanisms into one place, but there is still the issue of working with them better to achieve better results.
 - There are issues in the context of current state of play (there seems to be a lot of initiatives who claim to do science for policy, but the question is if they really do it and what is the quality of their work).
- There is a book “Crisis of expertise” which mentions two tensions which can never be resolved and we should keep them in mind:
 - An issue of extension: do we involve only scientists **vs.** do we extend the debate to more/broader field,
 - An issue of trust: do we trust the numbers **vs.** do we trust the person/scientist as such because of their expertise

Panel discussion

Topics mentioned during the debate by all the speakers:

- We should keep in mind that science is only one of the factors coming into play within policy making – there is also citizens’ science and other sources and policy makers need to take all these factors into account and scientist need to be aware of this.
- We usually feel that scientists are not biased, but they are – each scientist chooses his/her subjects of study, the methodology, the specific way they give advice etc., thus as a scientist it is crucial to understand that his/her advice is not the only one. On the other hand, policy makers should understand that they need science to make policies fully backed-up by data.
- We should be talking about a shift of thinking and allowing science to come into every step of the policy making process. Science should come in from the beginning to better understand the core problem and what the underlying issue of any problem is.



- There is no need for all scientists to do policy advice, but training could be offered to those interested in these activities (e.g. training in knowledge brokering, etc.)
- Science also needs to understand how disinformation works so that it can counteract it in an effective way. In this regard we often under-appreciate and over-appreciated the public at the same time – on one hand the general public often understands the main topics of scientific work more than we think, but on the other hand the culture, upbringing, religion and other factors influence how people view the world around them. There is a lot of disinformation, but research shows that in general it probably influences people less than we would think and it usually depends on how sophisticated the disinformation is. Therefore, there is a need to focus on the main long-term disinformation which actually influences and undermines the governments and democracy.
- The topics of S4P should be a more visible part of the next FP10.
- Experience from specific projects focused on S4P show that it is often difficult to transfer S4P approaches to different environments and to generalize them to make them more widespread. Often specific methodologies work within one project, but it is hard to simplify these methodologies and results to make them work for all sectors.
- The ERA is a peace-time integration initiative and there are important aspects to celebrate, but the days ahead seem more challenging and should be about resilience and seeing fragmentation and diversity as an advantage and strength not as a hindrance (e.g. EU might not have that many “unicorns”, but in the end they do not make that much impact, more impact might come from “pollinators” and those we can find in the EU).
- In Austria there is an ongoing project based on the Council Recommendation on intellectual property from 2010 (which aimed at creating NCP for IP), there were some changes over the years and now Austria is looking at knowledge valorisation and is in the process of creating a Recommendation on knowledge valorisation.
- There need to be some incentives for scientist to get involved in policy making (also incentives for supervisors, leaders of research organizations etc.).
- There is a need to re-think the social contract between science and society and maybe also to re-define why research is there and what it is good for to enable better mutual understanding. We should make sure that research organizations embrace their role in society and we should bring society into science, meaning not doing research somewhere separately and only then think about how the results should be translated into broader public. It is better to connect both sides right away at an earlier stage.
- There is an issue of how to combine effective policy advice with independence – we need to be careful about “ordered reports” which say whatever the “buyer” wants them to say.
- We need to keep in mind that science is also country and sector specific, therefore it is for example not possible (or not easy) to have one report on EU level and just translate it into 27 languages.

