D6.1 SEARCH DELIVERABLE

Guidelines for Reporting WP2-WP5 Policy - Relevant Research Details.

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SEARCH
SHARING KNOWLEDGE ASSETS: INTERREGIONALLY COHESIVE NEIGHBORHOODS

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
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Sharing KnowledgE Assets: InteRregionally Cohesive NeigHborhoods (SEARCH) Project

Deliverable 6.1: Guidelines for Reporting WP2-WP5 Policy-Relevant Research Details

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ABSTRACT

The SEARCH project is explicitly focused on enlarging our understanding of what is possible to expand or improve within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It is therefore important to stress the sometimes unclear but essential relationships between the evidence and findings that result from well-organised scientific investigations and how to report their implications for maximum policy impact. Researchers are encouraged to select research methodologies and data sources from suitable "hierarchies of evidence" to permit the preparation of reliable evidence-based policies. A template is provided for the inclusion of "Policy Notes" in all study documents prepared by researchers whose project task findings may have implications for ENP.

6.1.1 Preface

The guidelines presented here apply to all research findings from the SEARCH project that could have policy relevance. This deliverable is intended for internal purposes of the SEARCH project, although it may be applicable to other research efforts as well. Additional materials intended to guide the reporting, collecting and review of policy evidence will be provided by WP6 at later stages of the process. This deliverable focuses primarily on the timely reporting of policy relevance embedded in various tasks of WP2-5 (*Policy Notes*) and it anticipates the subsequent preparation of *Policy Briefs* by research teams.

6.1.2 Overview

Our SEARCH Project has taken the documentation and reporting of policy-relevant research seriously, as this was an important selection criterion and EC expectations have risen. Recent political developments in the EU neighbourhood place even greater importance on reporting fully the policy implications of our investigations. While WP6 has the principle responsibility for preparing an overall Final Policy Recommendation Report (D6.5) and an interim report on policy issues and inferences (D6.3), these depend wholly on the timely and accurate reporting of the policy research findings from WP2-WP5. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide

templates *early enough* in the project and *simple enough* to reduce the burden of reporting important policy-relevant details.

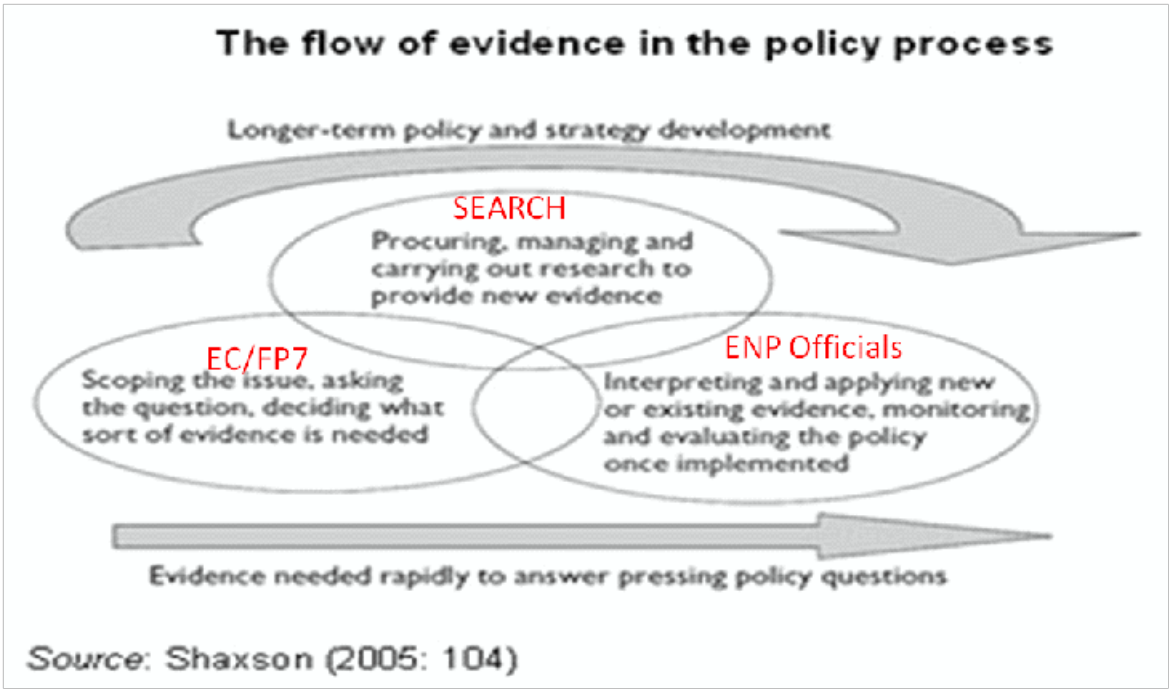
Some of these details are to be included and expanded upon in the *Policy Briefs* prepared by each workpackage team. The EC guidelines for *Policy Briefs*[1] have recently been revised, including many useful suggestions, further references and an example worthy of adoption. However, previous project experience has demonstrated the importance of timely policy-relevant research details collected from quite numerous, distant and frequently diffuse team members to support the preparation of *Policy Briefs*. These details will also be needed in the preparation of deliverables D6.1 and D6.5. It is therefore important that these *Policy Note* guidelines be applied by individual teams or members who prepare individual working papers, interim reports and other deliverables where policy-relevant findings are presented.

The guidelines below are expected to result in a 2-3 page *Policy Notes* addendum to be attached to each SEARCH working paper, interim report or other deliverable where policy-relevant findings are presented. All or portions of the addendum text may also be worked into the draft of the document and attached as an appendix, but the addendum is to be supplied as a separable element useful for policy reporting.

6.1.3 Core Assumptions: Research and Evidence-based Policy

We begin by recognizing that SEARCH project members are generally operating on the assumption that the findings of their research are the evidence on which new or existing ENP policies might be considered afresh. At the same time, we also recognize that we academic researchers are ill-equipped to design or invent the policies implied by our evidence. These distinctions for this project are anticipated (in quotes) by Shannon (2005): EC funding authorities (FP7) are charged with "scoping the issue, asking the questions, deciding what evidence is needed, and procuring the research", 2. SEARCH investigators are charged with "managing and carrying out research to provide new evidence", and 3. ENP *policymakers* then "interpret and apply new or existing evidence, monitoring and evaluating the policy once implemented" (ODI, n.d.). These stages are illustrated in the following graphic.

[1] *Policy Briefs* are obligatory deliverables, which are to be prepared by WP2-5 and those major SEARCH working papers or reports designated by the coordinator. It is expected that each of the substantive WPs will select and prepare 4-5 *Policy Briefs*. The selection should be announced as early as feasible to the WP6 coordinator. Its template is so designed that information from *Policy Notes* may be directly embedded in the *Policy Brief* document, which means some of the reporting is already available. European Commission. 2010. *Communicating research for evidence-based policymaking*. ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/ssh/docs/guide-communicating-research_en.pdf



The research undertaken here is intended to advance our overall understanding of forces and mechanisms at work in the ENP theatre, and to test how newly gained insights might help advance various policy goals. Applied research of this type goes beyond pure investigations of phenomena to help "apply" our understanding of it to problems and opportunities facing ENP. The goal of providing "research-based policy" findings has been advanced in more formal terms across a wide spectrum of policy concerns, from medicine to development. Indeed, one also notices a spectrum of "research-based policy" approaches, ranging from examples presented by development economists/other researchers who place value on enhancing the capabilities of transitional policy-making institutions served by their research—e.g. European Union Neighbours—and whose policy mandates are responsible for commissioning the research (Omamo and Naseem, 2005; Milani, 2009; European Training Foundation, 2011; Bertin, n.d., UNICEF, 2008). A particularly helpful comparative overview of how social science research is absorbed into policies by the United Nations University, The European Union and the European Research Area, The World Bank, and OECD is worth mentioning, as provided by Milani (2009).

Compare these with approaches and examples familiar to most European and developed-world economists/other researchers whose independently-funded research is often formulated straightforwardly as policy inferences intended for an attentive and accomplished policy community already at ease with research-based policy findings (see Baldwin, 2007, and VOX, n.d.1). Indeed, we find in their work very close approximations of policy interests by some who could easily be SEARCH colleagues (VOX, n.d.2).

It is more likely that the approach best suited to our SEARCH project is some combination of the two, where the research commissioned is understood to entail both conceptually rigorous inquiry

of potential theoretical consequence and systematic efforts to assist ENP policymaking, particularly for ENP policymakers who are reasonably skilled in the translation of research inferences to specific policies. The approaches and examples of each approach are mentioned here as helpful guides to preparation of policy-relevant findings.

The *research* tasks facing SEARCH investigators have been formalized most completely in the literatures of evidence-based medical research in which a "hierarchy of evidence" is put forth, where the greatest confidence in findings is placed on evidence drawn from studies that rank highest on the hierarchy, in which meta-analyses of randomized controlled trials rank highest, and expert opinions rank lowest. The following illustrate national guidelines for the U.S., UK, and Australia.

> The US Government's evidence hierarchy for medical research
> I: Properly powered and conducted randomised controlled trial (RCT); well conducted systematic review or meta-analysis of homogeneous RCTs
> II-1: Well-designed controlled trial without randomisation
> II-2: Well-designed cohort or case-control analytic study
> II-3: Multiple time series with or without the intervention; dramatic results from uncontrolled experiments
> III: Opinions of respected authorities, based on clinical experience; descriptive studies or case reports; reports of expert committees
>
> The UK Government's evidence hierarchy for policymakers
> 1. Systematic review — Synthesis of results from several studies
> 2. Randomised controlled trial — Population allocated randomly to groups
> 3. Quasi-experimental study — Similar populations compared
> 4. Pre-post study — Results compared before and after intervention
>
> Possible Evidence hierarchy for Australian policymakers
> 1. Systematic reviews (meta-analyses) of multiple randomised trials
> 2. High quality randomised trials
> 3. Systematic reviews (meta-analyses) of natural experiments and before-after studies
> 4. Natural experiments (quasi-experiments) using techniques such as differences-in-differences, regression discontinuity, matching, or multiple regression
> 5. Before-after (pre-post) studies
> 6. Expert opinion and theoretical conjecture
>
> From Leigh, 2006

Objections to the rote acceptance of these or similar hierarchical choices hinge on the purposes of research: the traditional hierarchy probably applies best for confirmatory purposes, i.e., "randomized trials *confirm* the differential effects of an investigational intervention on a defined outcome when compared to standard treatment." This may apply to very selective types of

policy evaluation research in which specific interventions are being studied. In contrast, SEARCH investigators are engaged in more open—yet theoretically-driven—investigations whose focus is better understanding of some system to which policies might be applied. So-called "learning studies, by contrast, may or may not be randomized, are typically smaller, involve a larger number of comparators, measure a large number of outcomes, and may benefit from alternative approaches to statistical analysis (for instance, Bayesian approaches)" La Caze, 2006. This and similar clarifications that apply to policy research may lead one to consider modified hierarchies of evidence and research which tend involve an expansion of the lower part of the traditional hierarchy in recognition of multiple research approaches. These issues affect the choices of and rationales for the research designs and evidence that SEARCH members bring to bear in their studies, the selection of which are to be documented in the Policy Notes.

6.1.4 Proposed Template for *Policy Notes*

The contents of the *Policy Notes* addendum are laid out below and consist of 3 main parts: 1. Objectives of research re. policy, 2. Scientific/Research methods, and c. Policy value-added. Parts 1. and 2. can be completed as soon as the research design is complete and work is underway, while part 3. requires research results. In total, this should require about 2-3 pages of text. Each section will also help contribute to the preparation of various *Policy Brief* sections, as indicated below.

1. Objectives of Research re. Policy

Provide 1+ paragraph(s) summary of the principal policy issue(s) that this SEARCH document or task addresses. Mention what may be known or presently controversial about the policy issue(s), its importance by level (EU to local), and its relation to the ENP policy framework. We need to know how this task element could contribute to an overall understanding of ENP policy potentials. (later useful for preparing *Policy Brief* Introduction (p.1) and Objectives and Methodology (p. 4) sections)

2. Scientific/Research Methods

Provide a 1+ page discussion of the research design you have selected and how well-suited it is to understanding the policy research objectives listed in 1. (above). Please include: a. source(s) of evidence, "evidence hierarchy" and policy relevance of the evidence you will analyse in your research, b. analytic methods or models you will employ and their capacity to generate policy inferences, and c. theoretical or conceptual framework you have adopted to guide the research. We want to know how well-suited you think the research results might be as policy-relevant findings. (later useful for preparing *Policy Brief* Introduction (p.1) and Objectives and Methodology (p. 4) sections)

3. Policy Value-added

Provide a 1+ page summary of the findings that have policy relevance, particularly those that affect policy issues mentioned in 1. (above). Include in your discussion findings that confirm or challenge existing ideas about these policy issues, including key citations about existing views. Mention findings that may imply new or novel policy possibilities, or that uncover major unrecognized questions. Indicate the degree to which findings can be generalized, or if their applicability might be limited by specific geography, institutions or circumstance. If you have ideas about policy recommendations you would like to mention, please include them as well. (later useful for preparing *Policy Brief* Evidence and Analysis (p.2) and Policy Recommendations (p. 3) sections)

Please attach this completed template as the final appendix to the working paper, project report or deliverable of policy relevance. If editing feedback on parts of the addendum would be helpful at an early stage, please forward drafts to the WP6 project team.

The policy reporting phase of SEARCH and the *Policy Notes* template will be discussed at the March 2012 meetings in Vienna.

Web-accessible Literature

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VOX, n.d.2. *About.* http://voxeu.org/index.php?q=node/3


AQR
IREA

Utrecht University

SEED CENTER
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CRENoS

LSE

WU
WIRTSCHAFTS UNIVERSITÄT WIEN VIENNA UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

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UNIVERSITY
LONDON

Université
Jean
Monnet
SAINT-ETIENNE

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Universität
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