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**9TH SESSION OF THE
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THEORETICAL REFLECTION ON RESEARCH-POLICY NEXUS

FIRST PART

UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector is devoted to advancing knowledge and promoting intellectual cooperation with a view to facilitating social transformations while upholding the universal value of social justice. It is the profound conviction of the MOST programme that if we are to achieve this goal we need to more successfully relate political decisions to scientific knowledge.

MOST, however, recognizes the tension that exists between social science research and the realm of policy making. Researchers and policy makers, often joined by representatives of civil society, partake in a complex interactive process whose effects have profound societal ramifications. Social science does not only act to solve problems, but also to change perceptions, visions and policy priorities. A theoretical elucidation of the nature of social science and its relation to policy making can lead to pertinent and innovative policy lessons. This undertaking is both intellectually necessary and socially worthwhile.

1. Presentation

MOST's specific aim is to foster and consolidate the building of efficient bridges between social science research and public policies. Thus, the Programme seeks to:

- a) theoretically grasp and elucidate the complex and multifaceted social links that exist between the world of research and that of policy making and
- b) position itself methodologically with a view to operationally enhancing the use of social science research by decision makers.

To carry out this undertaking, we rely on two types of resources: internal SHS experience and external knowledge produced by specialists in their respective domains. The importance of the present course of action has required us to schedule our activities over 3 biennial periods, starting in 2008.

In addition to the MOST Secretariat,, the actors involved in this process are the members of the MOST Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). The first meeting of the new SAC was organized as a “side event” during the “World Social Forum” organized by the International Social Sciences Council and held in Bergen (Norway) from 10 to 12 may 2009. At this meeting we presented an overview of our endeavor and discussed its initial outcomes: the Highlights from the International Forum of Social Science – Policy Nexus report (see the 2nd Part of this report). The goal of the “side event” was to generate scientific discussion on the substance of our activity and to get feedback from the SAC members.

The most important expected results of our action should be a particular generation of knowledge (on the Research-Policy links: R/P-L) and method (on how to carry out efficient activities fostering the R/P-L). Therefore, analytical work, discussion and debates are our means, while publications, MOST Policy Papers and Policy Briefs are our results.

Our strategy follows 5 points:

1. The theoretical/methodological nature of the activity has an applicational aim. It allows us to know “what” and “how we know” about R/P-L.
2. To prevent mechanic approaches, we problematize critically the R/P-L.
3. The question is also addressed through an institutional analysis which will allow us to understand “how we know” in terms of actors and organizational logic.
4. Processes generating, using, assessing and sharing knowledge in the R/P-L are dynamic, and therefore demand dynamic outcomes. Thus, the outcomes may be “positive” and “negative”.
5. Beyond the analytical interest of R-P/L, our endeavor focuses on debating, disseminating and sharing of this knowledge through publications.

2. Main current activities

During the first biennium (2008-2009), MOST’s main purpose has been to systemize and disseminate the outcomes from the **International Forum on the Social Science-Policy Nexus**, to capture data followed by analytical and methodological work and to publish the report (a summary of its contents can be found in the second part of this document). At the same time, the primary current activities are focused on capacity-building, analytical orientation and dissemination of the results through the organization of Summer Schools, and the publication of a state of the art collection.

2.1 MOST Summer Schools

The **Fifth Session of the MOST International Summer School**, organized in close cooperation with the International Social Science Council (ISSC), will take place in Sofia (Bulgaria), from 3 to 9 September 2009. This Session will be devoted to R-P/L under the title, “Comparative Research in the Social Sciences and Social Policies”.

The **Third Session of the MOST Latin American and Caribbean Summer School**, organized by the *Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo* (FUNGLODE) and the *Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana* (CLAEH) with the help of the *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales* (CLACSO), will be held in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) from 7 to 11 December 2009. This Session will be also devoted to the R-P/L under the title, “Social Science-Policy Nexus: Social Development Policies on Crisis Period”.

2.2 State of the art collection

The other main activity is to develop a general “state of the art” collection composed of literature reviews, classical publications, and research-paper analysis, review of various congress, conferences, programmes and institutions working on R-P/L.

The action will deliver three **annotated bibliographies**:

1. General (2010)
2. English publications (2009)
3. Spanish publications / gray literature (2010)

We created a Collection of 24 **Policy Briefs** in the “MOST Tool” and are publishing four **MOST Policy Papers**:

1. **MOST Policy Paper N° 18** (Originally in English and translated into French): Evidence-based policy research: critical review of some international programmes on relationships between social science research and policy-making, by Carlos S. Milani. UNESCO, 2009. 58p.
2. **MOST Policy Paper N° 18**: *Les organisations internationales et les liens entre la recherche en sciences sociales et les politiques publiques : Analyse critique de certains programmes*, by Carlos S. Milani. UNESCO, 2009. 67p.
3. **MOST Policy Paper N° 19**: *Stratégies de politique sociale et leçons de l’ajustement structurel : Retour sur l’expérience argentine dans l’horizon latino-américain* by Susana Peñalva. UNESCO, 2009. 68p.
4. **MOST Policy Paper N° 20**: Designing solutions? Exploring the research-policy nexus, by Georgios Papanagnou (foreseen for 2010).

2.3 New UNESCO publication series

The first outcome of this endeavor is the launching of a new UNESCO publication series: “**Research & Policy**” that will be published in English, French and Spanish. The first book will be: “Mapping out the Research-Policy Matrix: Highlights from the First International Forum on the Social Science-Policy Nexus.” 2010, 113p.

Subsequent titles will include:

- The Spanish translation of the first book (2010, 120p)
- “Social Research, Evidence and the Policy Process: the role of social science in the policy process. With the participation of known specialists of most all world regions” (2010)

- A volume of case studies on the role of research in poverty policies in Latin America (2010, 240p)
- “In-forming policies: A Critical Review and Proposal for Action” (2011)
- Further publications will include case studies, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, and regional overviews.

SECOND PART

MAPPING OUT THE RESEARCH-POLICY MATRIX. A REPORT ON THE OUTPUTS FROM THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE SOCIAL SCIENCE-POLICY NEXUS

3. Presentation

The International Forum on the Social Science – Policy Nexus (IFSP) was held in 2006 in collaboration with the Argentinean and Uruguayan governments and with the support of ISSC and six international organizations: ILO, UNDESA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNRISD, UNU-CRIS and WB. Its explicit goal was to create an innovative space where social scientists, policy-makers, and civil society actors could be brought together to explore common languages and frames of reference. Ninety-eight workshops were held across four host cities in which 497 speakers addressed the nexus in five thematic areas relevant to UNESCO’s Social and Human Science programme of action. Over 2000 participants from all over the world examined current practices and problems in areas such as social policy, migration, urban policy and globalization.

The forum set a precedent in the way it allowed for dialogue between researchers and policy-makers, and thus provided the impetus for this publication series. Approximately 1/3 of the IFSP workshops and 20 documents were selected for potential analysis of the approaches to the issue of the nexus.

The specific objective of the report on the IFSP is to map out the analytical and methodological approaches used and discussed in a selection of workshops. The main research questions are: *What do the IFSP workshops tell us about the possible manners of perceiving and dealing with the science-policy nexus? What conceptual frameworks do they propose?* These main questions were then directed into new and more specific ones: Concerning the role of social science in policy-making: *If social science matters in the policy process, how and when does research matter? Or conversely, if social research does not really matter in policy decision-making, why does it not?*

Concerning the thematic dimensions of the nexus: *Does the understanding and perception of the science-policy nexus change when different policy areas are at stake, or is the arena of applicability of the research-policy interface not relevant in this view? Is there any specificity in the workshops’ approaches to the nexus at the different national, regional, and global levels?*

The work was done in successive phases. 16 working months were divided into 3 stages. The first month was exploratory. It included gathering information, conducting initial

screenings of the material and actors, making initial contacts with authors and creating an interpretative hypothesis. The second stage was analytical, and combined the continued gathering of information with internal discussion meetings. The final stage consisted of a final analysis and deeper discussions, and culminated in a consultation with the members of the MOST Scientific advisory committee.

The first book of the new series, **‘Mapping out the Research-Policy Matrix: Highlights from the First International Forum on the Social Science – Policy Nexus’** is expected to be released at the end of 2009. It will have 2 parts. The first one will be a presentation of the results of the report and the second part will consist of some of the most important unpublished papers discussed during the IFSP on the issue of the R-P/L, including the following:

- ALASUUTARI, Pertti: The governmentality of consultancy and competition: the influence of the OECD (Tampere University, Finland).
- CALDERON, Fernando: La globalización y las nuevas condiciones sociales del desarrollo y la democracia.
- CHOUCRI, Nazli: "The Politics of Knowledge Management" (Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT)
- RODGERS, Gerry: "The knowledge base for the work of the World Commission". (World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalisation ILO-IILS)
- VAN KAMENADE, Solange: Investigación y elaboración de políticas sociales en el área de la salud a nivel federal en Canadá (Senior Research Analyst - Agence de la santé publique du Canada - Public Health Agency of Canada)

4. A map of the IFSP

The most salient characteristic of the IFSP was the variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the nexus it displayed. The “map” of these approaches aims to clarify how the different workshop organizers perceived and addressed the nexus. It does not presuppose a unique nature or a main paradigm of the nexus.

The task was achieved by applying typologies that were used and discussed within the material itself. The most important conclusion, drawn out of the exploration of the workshops’ outcomes, is the necessity to distinguish, in both epistemic and political terms, “instrumental” from “conceptual” approaches to the research-policy interface.

Firstly, the “map” presents a series of workshops and documents that offer a more instrumental and practical approach for dealing with the nexus. They focus on policy-relevant research and on the different kinds of gaps that need to be bridged. These workshops define the problem of the nexus in terms of an absence of policy-relevant research, a lack of access to research and data for policy makers, and a lack of communication and comprehension between researchers and policy makers. Workshops that endorsed this approach strove for the adoption of a common agenda embraced by both realms.

Secondly, the “map” critically reviews workshop results, emphasizing more conceptual approaches to the nexus. These approaches are presented as a critical alternative to those more instrumental approaches of research use. Workshops that fall into this category don’t perceive the issue in terms of policy-relevant research having a direct impact, but rather, in terms of broader patterns of socio-political, economic and cultural influence, thus questioning the presuppositions of a single adequacy of scientific research for policy-making. The workshops that endorse this “conceptual” approach address the indirect uses of research in the framing of policy issues. From this perspective, research is constantly being used, implicitly or explicitly, in the whole policy process.

Various other contributions proposed very useful typologies which distinguished paradigms of research “use” and “usefulness”. A few of these approaches criticized the kind of social and political engineering, usually associated with knowledge management procedures through which actors can have access to knowledge available “in the global market of ideas.” They focused instead on possible ways to enhance the participation of “knowledge users” in the up-stream definition of policies that takes place in problem-oriented networks of stakeholders. The concepts of paradigm, frame of reference and advocacy coalition are central to this approach.

Many of these approaches mixed elements from a variety of typologies, one example being the classic seven-model typology proposed by Weiss, which shows the progressive contrast between instrumental and conceptual uses of research.

Finally, the “map” shows workshops discussing *participatory approaches*. Endorsing evidence-based policy raises the question on what is likely to be a persistent tension in democratic societies between making political decisions on the basis of the public experience and belief as opposed to on the basis of scientific evidence. Traditional social science academic research is only one method among many, of acquiring knowledge.

There are other strong claims that other more bottom-up and user-driven ways of knowledge utilization are gaining ground. This is particularly evident in the realm of social and urban policy, due to the active involvement of concerned people in action-research initiatives.

5. Concluding remarks

The report of IFSP explores the approaches that accompany the most important work of R-P/L presented at the Forum. It identifies the components of the matrix that constitutes the problematic of the linkages between research and policy.

It sheds light on the intricate nature of a nexus that commonly brings face to face both of its constitutive poles, as well as the networks wherein these interactions are embedded. The map shows the need of establishing three levels of distinction. First, the difference between *instrumental from more reflexive and conceptual uses of knowledge approaches* to the nexus. Second, there are approaches that focus on identifying the impact of research might have on policy, while there are others that constantly influence the way in which social actors, directly or indirectly, understand and shape the world.

The analysis further shows the necessity to consider the approaches that focus on specific agents (such as gender perspective), alternative processes (such as knowledge co-production), new institutions (such as *think tanks*) and finally new processes of university reforms.

In this sense, the first conclusion establishes that **there is no common stance on the role of social scientists in policy making, but rather, a variety of quite different – and even antagonistic – ways of dealing with the issue. However, along with the variety of approaches**, the report identifies common trends across many workshops. While certain elements cannot be reconciled within the conceptual frameworks used by different workshops, there is, in many cases, a strong tendency to combine and balance their own analytical components of various theories, establishing a method somewhat eclectic.

In the same way, in spite of some irreconcilable elements to be found within the conceptual frameworks used by the different workshops, there is a strong tendency to blend and balance different analytical components rooted in different theories.

For example, attention is commonly drawn to the fact that an **effective strategy** to enhance the linkages between social science and policy should be underpinned by a theoretical and methodological framework that takes the interplay of different social actors into account. In such a theoretical framework, concepts of science, policy and authority should be considered together with those of citizenship, empowerment and accountability. New political theories on knowledge management and the widespread concern of some advocates of evidence-based policy in the co-production of knowledge are good examples of this trend.

Against narrow and less problematizing conceptions of the use of research and its impact on policy-making new, more reflective approaches propose wider ways of seeing and dealing with social science. Interpretative frameworks of social science research use envisage a bigger potential for social sciences to be used in an interactive way. These frameworks highlight the fact that research restructures itself alongside other forms of knowledge during the process of its use. Because knowledge and social orders are co-produced, it is within social and political processes that the relevance, quality and value of knowledge are defined.

Considering this, the report finally recommends that further focus on theoretical and methodological developments in both the realms of policy and research put forward wider ways of seeing the role of knowledge in the political life of contemporary societies. It is necessary to study the different social actors involved in the political and epistemic processes that determine the research-policy nexus at the national, the regional and the global levels of governance. In the same way, the specificity of the nexus in different policy fields needs to be further examined in order to build up more accurate descriptions of not one but many nexuses.