P15 / Evidence use: empirical insights on practices and impact of knowledge mobilisation on decision-making

Topic : POLICY DESIGN, POLICY ANALYSIS, POLICY CAPACITY

Chair : Hannah Durrant (Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University)

Second Chair : Eleanor MacKillop (Cardiff University)

Third Chair : James Downe (Cardiff University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Interest in the role that evidence, knowledge and expertise can play in decision-making (by which we mean public policy and public service practice decisions) is growing worldwide, with many countries trialing infrastructure for mobilising evidence in policy and practice at national, regional and local levels (MacKillop & Downe, 2023).

And yet, there is still little research outside of health which demonstrates what aids evidence utilization and whether evidence has a positive impact on decision-making. In particular, examples of good quality empirical research illustrating how, why and which forms of research-policy engagement or knowledge mobilisation/brokerage practices work in particular contexts are needed in order for governments to determine whether to invest further into such initiatives and approaches (Bornbaum et al, 2015; Durrant et al, 2024; Neal et al, 2023). Another key area needing more research is the impact of knowledge mobilisation and evidence on decision-making and outcomes, and the challenges, implications and limitations involved (Oliver et al, 2022; Smith & Stewart, 2017).

This panel will draw together research from different contexts and perspectives (e.g., policy fields, geographical areas, and methodological approaches) to examine knowledge mobilisation and build better understanding of the practices it involves and impact it has.

We welcome papers that advance understanding of these topics, providing either new empirical, theoretical, methodological, or comparative insights. The two research questions at the heart of this panel are:
o What is the impact of knowledge mobilisation on evidence use in decision-making?
o What are the key practices of knowledge mobilisation that lead to impact on decision-making?

Other related questions include:
o What practices of knowledge mobilisation have been developed and implemented in different countries or contexts?
o Who is involved in developing and implementing different practices of knowledge mobilisation?
o What does the evaluations of knowledge mobilisation practices tell us about whether they work in informing policy and practice?
o What can we learn from knowledge mobilisation across different policy areas or geographical areas? In other words, how do practices of knowledge mobilisation relate to the context in which they are implemented?
o How do different political systems and cultures influence what counts as evidence and how evidence is used?
o What innovative methods are currently being used in different countries to measure the impact of evidence use?
o What methods exist that can help make sense of how evidence/knowledge mobilisation interacts with decision-making? E.g., theory of change, models of impact, tools and processes?

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CALL FOR PAPERS

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P15 / Evidence use: empirical insights on practices and impact of knowledge mobilisation on decision-making

Chair : Hannah Durrant (Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University)

Second Chair : Eleanor MacKillop (Cardiff University)

Third Chair : James Downe (Cardiff University)

Session 1The practices of knowledge mobilisation

Wednesday, July 2nd 13:45 to 15:45 (B8)

Examining the mobilisation of ethical advice in policy making

Sarah Ball (University of Queensland)

Holger Strassheim (Bielefeld University)

This paper examines the role of ethical advisory ecosystems in public policy, exploring their contribution to knowledge mobilisation and decision-making processes. While significant attention has been given to policy advisory systems (PAS) and scientific advisory committees (SAC), the mobilisation of ethics expertise remains underexplored. Drawing on literature from bioethics, policy studies, and health governance, we trace the evolution of ethics advisory systems from their bioethical origins to their modern, interdisciplinary forms. Employing a framework informed by PAS and SAC research, we develop a typology of ethical advisory institutions and map their structures and practices in the UK, Australia, and Germany.

Our analysis uncovers significant national variations driven by governance cultures, revealing challenges in conceptualising ethical advice as a coherent and parsimonious practice. These differences have implications for understanding how ethical advice is mobilised and its impact on decision-making.

We conclude by advocating for an expanded focus on the content-related dimensions of ethical advice, alongside institutional factors, to better understand the barriers to and facilitators of impactful knowledge mobilisation by ethics advisory ecosystems. This approach offers a pathway to better assess the role of ethics expertise in informing the design and implementation of ethical and evidence-informed policy.

The role of knowledge brokering organisations in facilitating academic-policy engagement.

Hannah Durrant (Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University)

Rosalind Phillips (Wales Centre for Public Policy)

James Downe (Cardiff University)

There is widespread belief that the use of evidence in policymaking will lead to better outcomes. One source of evidence for policy is academic research (Britchfield & Sasse, 2020), which is increasingly expected to prove its social and economic value (Young et al, 2002). Mechanisms for academics to inform policy vary across political systems, but in the UK include direct routes for engagement - e.g., commissioned research, advisory roles, secondments etc. - and indirect routes - e.g., via knowledge brokering organisations (KBO) – that act as evidence intermediaries between research and policy (MacKillop et al, 2023).

This study examines the experience of academics working with one KBO – the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) – to influence policymaking in Wales. The Centre partners with researchers to provide ministers, civil service, and public service providers in Wales with high quality, independent evidence. While there is a growing body of scholarship on how KBOs function (MacKillop et al, 2020; Neal et al, 2022), less is known about their impact on researchers and research utilisation. We address this gap by reporting findings from a survey and semi-structured interviews with UK-based academics engaging with WCPP since 2017. We examine the effects on their research impact, research agenda and academic practice (e.g., nature/volume of publications, further policy engagement and contributions to the Research Excellence Framework).

The effectiveness of any route for research-policy engagement is contextually contingent and often unclear (Oliver et al, 2022). Direct engagement requires significant investment in relationship building but can increase research relevance and impact. Risks include co-option of research, reputational damage, and less imaginative or duplicative research (Oliver et al, 2019; Flinders, 2016; 2024). Indirect engagement via a KBO may mitigate these risks by providing established relationships, bidirectional context and evidence synthesis (Durrant et al, 2023) which helps academics and policymakers navigate engagement, but may widen the gap between researchers and policymakers and misrepresent research evidence (Oliver et al, 2019).

Our findings reinforce and raise additional advantages and disadvantages for academics partnering with a KBO. We find that KBOs play an active role in knowledge mobilisation; iteratively codetermining research-policy questions with policymakers and academics, managing politics and balancing research integrity with political relevance, providing financial resources, accessing data, and facilitating reputation and network building. We find evidence for feedback from policy engagement to research agendas. Policy engagement can directly result in academic papers, inform research questions more closely aligned to policy challenges, and establish the relationships that lead to future collaborations. The extent to which this would happen with or without knowledge brokers is disputed, especially as our findings also highlight the sometimes transactional and extractive nature of KBOs. Brokering often stops at the point that research evidence has been provided, with deliberation on impact taking place ‘behind-closed-doors’. KBOs are sometimes perceived to be ‘captured’ by political priorities and preferences. Our findings shed light on the benefits and costs of policy engagement via a KBO and have implications for the practice of knowledge brokering to enhance the relevance and use of research.

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Embedded Impact Research at the Wales Centre for Public Policy

Findlay Smith (Cardiff University)

Hannah Durrant (Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University)

Scholars of evidence-based or evidence-informed policy making and practitioners alike have bemoaned the gap between research and policy. Knowledge Brokering Organisations (KBOs) are an increasingly popular approach to bridging this gap and encouraging the use of evidence in policy-making. The emergence and proliferation of such organisations in the last decade has been accompanied by a range of studies analysing their form and activity. We know an ever-increasing amount about the different roles of KBOs, the characteristics of both individual knowledge brokers and KBOs, the various strategies they employ to bridge the gap between evidence and policy, and the myriad barriers and enablers of knowledge brokering that may impact the implementation of these strategies. Largely absent from this literature, however, is evidence of the impact of KBOs. Further, KBOs themselves have paid scant attention to evaluating their own impact and, to the extent they have, communicating the methods they use to do so.

This paper describes and reflects on the role of, and methods employed by the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) to plan for and evaluate the impact of its knowledge brokering activities. The WCPP is a knowledge brokering organisation based at Cardiff University in Wales which provides Welsh policy-makers with independent evidence to inform decision-making. It works collaboratively with policy-makers to identify evidence needs and research questions which are then addressed by small project teams of knowledge brokers. The WCPP also has a dedicated research team operating quasi-independently of the primary knowledge brokering activity which in 2024 introduced an Embedded Impact Researcher. Situated between embedded and insider research, the Embedded Impact Researcher is positioned within multiple project teams to support a range of impact capture activities.

The paper proceeds in three stages. First, it provides a critical analysis of the existing evidence on the impact of KBOs with a specific focus on the hitherto underexplored relationship between knowledge mobilisation practice and impact. Second, it outlines a protocol for capturing the impact of KBOs, including stakeholder analysis, impact planning, and stakeholder interviewing. It draws on a realist evaluation approach explicitly aimed at examining the complex relationship between knowledge mobilisation practice and impact. Third, it reflects on the process of evaluating KBOs, focusing on both the application the realist informed protocol and the author's reflections on conducting embedded/insider research.

This paper addresses the panel's focus on the key practices of knowledge mobilisation and its impact. It describes a protocol for capturing impact and examines how practices of knowledge mobilisation relate to their context. Specifically, this focuses on a KBO working within Wales with strong access to policy-makers. By describing and reflecting on the Embedded Impact Research role it also presents a novel, innovative approach to the study of the relationship between KBO practice and impact.

(Virtual) Innovative approaches to knowledge mobilisation for epistemic policy learning: Two case studies

Bridget Sealey (Sealey Associates Ltd, UK)

Duncan Russel (University of Exeter)

Andrew Mycock (University of Leeds)

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett (University of Leeds)

The aim of this paper is to use the lens of policy learning to create actionable insights from two examples of knowledge mobilisation methodologies. Our paper speaks to several of the panel's questions, but in particular:

>> What innovative methods are currently being used in different countries to measure the impact of evidence use?
>> What practices of knowledge mobilisation have been developed and implemented in different countries or contexts?

Policy learning has emerged as a central theme of policy analysis, developing understanding of issues of policy context, memory (or amnesia), learning, and transfer. Key to this evolving literature is the exploration of the hindrances and triggers of policy learning, and the extent to which policy actors are able or wish to learn from their practices and experiences.

There is a lack of analysis of how policy learning might relate to universities who have become increasingly active policy actors. UK higher education has progressively sought to promote, evaluate, and incentivise research impact, knowledge exchange, and policy engagement through a range of initiatives. The extent to which policy learning might relate to universities and their staff has however been largely overlooked, particularly when working in networked collaborations with policy actors.

This paper will focus on one of the four key elements of policy learning as identified by Dunlop and Radaelli (2018); ‘learning epistemically’, and will draw lessons for knowledge mobilisation from this, drawing on two case studies to explore the nature and impacts of university-focused policy learning.

Our first case study is one of the most significant knowledge mobilisation investments made by UK Government body Research England: the Yorkshire Policy Engagement Research Network (Y-PERN). This ambitious academic policy engagement programme deploys policy fellows to mobilise knowledge across a complex framework of devolved authorities in England. Y-PERN has been delivered during a period of significant political change and uncertainty, where multi-level regional and local governments have different levels of maturity, powers, resources, and capacities. Y-PERN’s policy fellow model encourages a relational approach to develop a more effective bridge between research and evidence-based policymaking.

The second project is the European Union funded Regreen project which looked at urban nature in three European cities: Paris (France), Aarhus (Denmark) and Velika Gorica (Croatia). In three European urban case study sites, Regreen developed a series of ‘Walkable Floor Map Policy Workshops’ (WFMPWs) that engaged policy makers in policy learning towards Nature Based Solutions innovation (Peterson et al, 2024). The project used walkable floor maps of the urban areas to facilitate learning between different stakeholders (public authorities, local environmental groups and businesses). It promoted spatial contextualisation within discussion and learning about the role urban nature plays in providing benefits to residents and to discuss future policy opportunities and barriers.

Through our two case studies, we will highlight modes of learning epistemically about knowledge mobilisation, identifying what is being learnt and what is the utility or otherwise of this learning. The paper will contribute to understanding of how universities can learn to better support evidence-based policymaking both iteratively and sustainably.

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Session 2Who is involved in knowledge mobilisation?

Wednesday, July 2nd 16:00 to 18:00 (B8)

Discussants

Eleanor MacKillop (Cardiff University)

(Virtual) Principles for Meaningfully Involving Experts-by-Experience in Knowledge Mobilisation for Policy Research and Practice

Rounaq Nayak (University of the West of England, Bristol)

Interest in the role of evidence, knowledge, and expertise in decision-making is growing globally, with increasing efforts to mobilise evidence to inform public policy and public service practice. While attention has been given to research utilisation in health, there remains a gap in understanding how knowledge mobilisation can be enriched through the inclusion of experts-by-experience (EbE) in policy research and knowledge brokering. Drawing on findings from a scoping review and an empirical interview-based study, this paper examines the principles for meaningfully involving EbE within knowledge mobilisation practices led by policy think tanks, knowledge brokering organisations, and similar intermediaries.

The study addresses key questions: What is the value of involving EbE in knowledge mobilisation? How and when should knowledge brokers draw on their expertise? What principles and practices enable effective, impactful, and ethical engagement with EbE? Evidence from the scoping review highlights the growing recognition of EbE as co-creators of knowledge, with potential to shift the power dynamics of traditional knowledge brokering. Empirical insights from interviews with knowledge brokers, policymakers, and EbEs underscore the practical challenges of embedding lived experience voices within research processes, while also pointing to solutions and examples of effective practice.

The paper identifies nine key principles for effective and ethical engagement with EbEs: (1) Preparation, planning, equitable decision-making; (2) Ensuring ethical and inclusive engagement; (3) Defining robust recruitment and selection criteria; (4) Customised capacity-building and professionalisation programmes for EbEs; and (5) Transparent documentation to ensure accountability; (6) Involvement during analysis and dissemination; (7) Communication and engagement with EbEs; (8) Adequate risk assessment; and (9) Evaluation and reflection. Each principle is illustrated with examples from practice, offering insight into the "how" of meaningful participation.

This paper contributes to the growing field of knowledge mobilisation by offering practical guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and knowledge brokering organisations. It argues that embedding the voices of lived experience not only enhances the relevance and impact of policy research but also shifts the paradigm of evidence use from "for" people to "with" people. The findings have implications for how think tanks, intermediaries, and evidence-to-policy initiatives approach knowledge mobilisation, with a view to increasing the legitimacy, authenticity, and applicability of policy decisions.

By advancing understanding of how EbEs can meaningfully shape knowledge mobilisation, this paper addresses core questions of the panel: What are the key practices of knowledge mobilisation that lead to impact on decision-making? And how can knowledge mobilisation efforts be structured to ensure more inclusive, ethical, and contextually relevant decision-making? The principles presented have wider applicability for evidence-use initiatives across different policy fields and geographical contexts, offering a foundation for ongoing reflection, evaluation, and refinement of engagement practices.

What Knowledge, What Mobilization? Exploring Collaborative Governance in Coastal and Marine Policy

Ellen Fobé (KU Leuven)

Cécile Blatrix (AgroParisTech)

European coastal regions face a variety of challenges stemming from social and environmental problems, including issues such as biodiversity loss, pollution, vulnerability to extreme weather events, or a decline of natural resources. These marine and coastal challenges have become more urgent and salient due to climate change. Coastal areas are particularly vulnerable to the various impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise or extreme weather events which have far-reaching impacts on societies. They can disrupt the quality of life of local environments and, beyond that, generate substantial negative economic impacts or health effects, in addition to bringing about biodiversity and environmental losses. While solutions are salient and urgent, several of the aforementioned problems have been on the societal and policy agenda for decades. Finding and realizing solutions has indeed proven anything but easy. Many actors have come to realize that current governance systems are ill-equipped for dealing with the particularities of coastal conditions (e.g. Brown et al., 2017; Van Assche et al., 2020). Their functioning is hampered by territorial, administrative and sectoral fragmentation, inadequate coordination, and in particular also by insufficient stakeholder involvement. Successful collaboration between public and private stakeholders via collective forums can, however, be crucial to tackle the challenges related to coastal and marine governance. After all, such 'collaborative governance' arrangements enable governments to mobilize policy relevant knowledge (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Creating, sharing and using policy relevant knowledge is assumed to lead to effective and more widely supported policy decisions. A varied group of stakeholders can bring this knowledge to the table. While public policy research has traditionally focused on the inclusion of scientific evidence stemming from academics or scientific research (Weiss, 1980), more recent works have included 'experience-based' or 'technical' expertise provided by individual citizens, (interest) group representatives or local community leaders (Fobé & Brans, 2013; Pattyn et al., 2022).

This paper investigates how governments mobilize knowledge through collaborative governance arrangements in case studies from five marine basins in Europe (Western Mediterranean Sea, Eastern Mediterranean Sea, North Sea, Atlantic Ocean). The cases are part of the European Horizon project 'Blue Green Governance' and reflect the rich diversity in current and expected environmental challenges for European marine and coastal regions. To be precise, they represent a variety of existing political and institutional settings within which collaborative governance arrangements have emerged. We will draw on interviews with scientific experts and a focus group with stakeholders from the various case studies to examine the different modes for collaboration and stakeholder participation. Moreover, the contribution will seek to highlight the different types of knowledge involved, including "non-scientific" forms of knowledge. Lay expertise is after all more and more recognized as crucial in sustainable resources management (Turnhout, Neves, 2019). Lastly, the article will explore the success factors for creating effective collaborative governance with stakeholders, relating to their context (power imbalances, prior conflicts) and process (trust, dialogue). The article concludes with a discussion of how to improve (the mobilization of knowledge through) collaborative governance processes.

Using action research for local knowledge mobilisation: Drawing on "grassroots" knowledge in the public service

Assel Mussagulova (University of Sydney)

Susan Goodwin (University of Sydney)

Using action research for local knowledge mobilisation:

Drawing on "grassroots" knowledge in the public service

Knowledge mobilisation, which refers to bringing evidence to practice settings and bringing practice issues to the attention of researchers, is an important aspect of the policy process, as it directly affects evidence utilisation (Durrant et al., 2024). Traditional linear models of knowledge mobilisation that conceive of the interaction between research and policy as research dissemination tend to ignore the diversity of forms of knowledge and their utility to policymakers.

In this paper we propose to rely on action research as a method for knowledge mobilisation that defies the linear approach. Action research involves the participation and leadership of people experiencing issues, in generating knowledge-for-action and knowledge-through-action (Smith-Carrier & Van Tuyl, 2024). Reflected in the connection between 'action' and 'research,' participants and researchers can test "ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge" (Corbett et al., 2007, p. 82). However,

the use of this method in designing responses to pressing problems in the public service is uncommon.

To demonstrate how action research can inform knowledge mobilisation we will present a case study of action research for improving pro-integrity cultures in the public sector in the Australian state of Victoria. Pro-integrity efforts lend themselves well to action research because there is a dearth of understanding on how to translate the values behind pro-integrity approaches into the “nitty gritty of everyday operations” (Rasche & Esser, 2007, p.108). Academic efforts rarely provide detailed, step-by-step, granular recommendations and actions for practitioners that can be easily integrated into everyday management of integrity (Maesschalck, Hoekstra, & van Montfort, 2024) rendering the usual research dissemination approach to knowledge mobilisation of limited use.

At the heart of the project is the creation of communities of practice comprised of public servants in four state government agencies that will identify integrity challenges, design interventions, trial them in their agency, and report back and reflect on their effectiveness in the first half of 2025. We will outline the future directions of using action research for knowledge mobilisation.

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Data for what? Potential and challenges of citizen-generated data to inform local policy-making

Fernanda Lima-Silva (Universidade de São Paulo)

Evangelos Pitidis (University of Warwick)

The debate surrounding evidence-based policymaking continues to gain traction, yet the extent to which evidence informs policy decisions remains contested. Existing scholarship has examined the barriers to the effective utilization of evidence in policymaking, highlighting challenges such as the political nature of decision-making processes, state capacity for engaging with evidence, the relationship between data producers and users, and the availability of high-quality, up-to-date evidence (Parkhurst, 2016; Newman, Cherney & Head, 2016; Cairney, 2016; Head, 2010). More recent research has explored variations in evidence use across different policy domains, as well as the role of institutional and individual capacity in shaping engagement with evidence (Saguin et al., 2024).

However, much of this literature focuses on national governments. With the exception of Durrant et al. (2024), there has been relatively little research on local-level knowledge mobilization processes and how they influence data usage practices within subnational governments. This article seeks to address this gap by examining the pathways through which citizen-produced data can inform decision-making and policymaking at the municipal level, particularly in contexts characterized by multiple vulnerabilities.

Methodologically, the study employs a multiple case study approach, analyzing the development of two research projects implemented in three Brazilian cities: São Paulo (M'Boi Mirim), Contagem/MG, and Rio Branco/AC. Our findings partially align with existing literature on evidence-based policymaking, demonstrating that citizen-generated data can reach policymakers and contribute to public policy development. However, we argue that the mere production and dissemination of such data do not guarantee its impact on policy decisions. The extent to which citizen-produced data informs policymaking is contingent on a range of contextual, relational and political factors, as well as the urban characteristics of the territories in question.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on knowledge mobilization by examining the intersection of evidence use and urban governance. By situating knowledge mobilization within the political and spatial

contexts in which it occurs, this research enhances our understanding of the conditions that facilitate or hinder the integration of citizen-generated data into policymaking processes.

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P15 / Evidence use: empirical insights on practices and impact of knowledge mobilisation on decision-making

Chair : Hannah Durrant (Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University)

Second Chair : Eleanor MacKillop (Cardiff University)

Third Chair : James Downe (Cardiff University)

Session 3International case studies of knowledge mobilisation practice 1

Thursday, July 3rd 08:00 to 10:00 (B8)

Discussants

Hannah Durrant (Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University)

(Virtual) A comparative analysis of Aotearoa New Zealand and the UK's approach to knowledge mobilisation for research-informed decision making.

Laura Bea (University of Southampton)

Juliet Gerrard

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett (University of Leeds)

Sarah Chaytor (University College London, University of London)

This paper seeks to build on recent mapping and conclusions from various actors in both the United Kingdom and Aotearoa New Zealand (Roy & Slim, 2022; Huntington, 2021; Breckon, forthcoming), and outline new developments in both countries related to academic-policy engagement.

In 2003, Nutley et al published a cross-sectoral analysis of evidence-policy structures in the UK, as a way of sharing reflections and lessons for New Zealand. Part of their conclusions included the need to agree on 'what counts as evidence', as well better understand the ''pull for evidence from potential end users' as much as 'pushing evidence' (2003; 42). They also note that there is 'little systematic evidence on the effectiveness of…initiatives aimed at increasing the use of evidence in policy', a sentiment echoed 16 years later by Oliver et al on the UK knowledge mobilisation space being a busy but rudderless mass of activity (2022).

Despite both spaces being in a constant state of flux, the UK has began to invest in and respond to universities' ability to engage with public policy and, more recently, in the connective tissue between universities and public policy actors, in an increasing effort to show the value of public investment in research (e.g Local Policy Innovation Partnerships (LPIPs), Policy Support Fund (PSF)). There is a growing number of policy functions in UK Universities, with a recognised need to constantly evaluate how best to accomplish the wider aims (Oliver et al, 2022). New Zealand has seen policy functions grow within higher education institutions, and the vital role of research for public policy decision making has been made clear from the Office of the Prime Ministers Chief Scientific Advisors Office (Roy & Slim, 2022; Gluckman, 2013; Scobie, 2010).

In addition to this, discourse and questions in these spaces surrounding the epistemological aspect of knowledge use in public policy are developing. In other words, how do our knowledge production systems uphold, create, or disrupt power hierarchies? What is the role of place and how is it understood and responded to in both contexts? Whilst the UK and NZ have differing contexts relating to, for example, colonialism and devolution, New Zealand's recent work and activity to integrate Maori (indigenous) knowledges into both research and decision making is one the UK can draw lessons from in acknowledging its own position as a major colonial and powerful system of knowledge production and reproduction, and how this could be decolonised. As well as this, the UK's recent work on place-based policymaking have integrated discussions around EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion), and how the many moving parts of

knowledge mobilisations structures can bring together dispersed debates around inclusive decision-making, left behind places, unheard voices, under-represented political philosophies, and diverse knowledges (see Renberg-Fawcett & Durrant, 2024; Bea & Recio-Saucedo, 2024; Morris et al, 2021).

Using narrative review to map the current state of play and draw comparisons between the UK and NZ, the aim of this paper is to highlight promising areas of practice, knowledge of what works where, and identify future directions for both contexts as well as international collaboration.

(Virtual) Culture and Institutionalization of Evidence Use in a Context of Political Polarization: a Comparative Study on the Social Assistance and Human Rights Sectors in Brazil

Natalia Koga (National School of Public Administration (ENAP))

Pedro Palotti (National School of Public Administration - ENAP)

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Recent literature in the field of evidence-informed policymaking highlights the importance of considering the various contexts in which evidence is mobilized to address crucial questions, such as what is considered evidence in a particular policy field, as well as the interactional, structural, and epistemic conditions for its mobilization (Pinheiro, 2022; Gill et al., 2024; WHO, 2023; Piddington et al., 2024).

This study applies the frameworks of institutionalization and evidence culture to analyze two underexplored fields of policymaking: human rights and social assistance. We define the culture of evidence as the set of values, assumptions, and beliefs reflected in the formal and informal rules, practices, and dominant ideas within a given field (Gill et al., 2024). Institutionalization, on the other hand, refers to the process through which something (in this study, the mobilization of evidence) becomes an integrated and recognized part of an organized system, achieving a degree of normalcy, routine, and stability (WHO, 2023; Suano et al., 2024). This process involves changes in both structures (e.g., preexisting resources and arrangements) and values or principles embedded in rules, incentives, and practices (Parkhurst, 2017; WHO, 2023).

As noted in recent studies and this call for papers, discussions about the use, production, and translation of evidence have primarily been pioneered in the health sector, gaining traction in fields such as education, environment, and innovation (Gill et al., 2024). However, limited research exists on the selected areas of human rights and social assistance. In Brazil and many other countries, these areas have historically been associated with progressive agendas and leftist government policies. Evidence in these fields often carries significant symbolic value—either through its production, to ensure the visibility of marginalized groups and rights violations, or through its absence or manipulation, as a tool to obscure vulnerabilities, violations, and discrimination.

In Brazil's recent context of heightened political and ideological polarization, these sectors have become increasingly sensitive to political and value-driven disputes. At the same time, there have been efforts by state actors to strengthen the institutionalization of evidence use in these policy areas (Koga et al., 2023; Pinheiro et al., 2024), making them especially relevant for study.

Against this backdrop, this paper employs an analysis of government documents, interviews, and focus groups with policy advisers and policymakers in the two policy areas to answer the following questions posed by the call for papers:
a) How do different political systems and cultures (such as those in social assistance and human rights) influence what counts as evidence and how evidence is used?
b) What knowledge mobilization practices have been developed and implemented in social assistance and human rights within polarized political contexts?
c) What can we learn from knowledge mobilization across different policy areas and political-institutional contexts? In other words, how do practices of knowledge mobilization relate to the policy and political contexts in which they are implemented?

Rising to the challenge? Assessing the impact of INE's 'Defining the Challenge' workshops

Alison Clarke (University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

Emily Rainsford (University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

Based in north-east England, Insights North East (INE) is a university-policy partnership intended to address complex regional challenges and improve local lives. INE was launched in 2022, funded by a £2.78m Research England grant, to pool the diverse expertise available across local universities and support regional policymakers to address the needs of local communities. Cuts to local government funding have

significantly reduced local policymaking capacity, hindering strategic policy development. We work across institutions to bridge the gap between policy research and practice through the provision of holistic, actionable and evidence-based policy solutions.

As well as intervening at the later stages of policy formation, INE is particularly well-placed to facilitate expert access to discussions that seek to clarify a societal problem, its causes, and potential impacts (Mansilla et al., 2024). These findings align with previous work that both highlights a distinct knowledge gap between the policy and research communities, and argues that the greater engagement of policymakers and stakeholders in the co-production of knowledge can help to close this gap (Gluckman et al., 2021).

In particular, our paper focuses on the relationship-building and demand-led approach that has allowed INE and our partners unusually early access to regional policymakers at the very beginning of the policy development process. Throughout our first year of operation, a significant challenge was to identify policy challenges that can map onto academic expertise. Policy challenges are often broadly scoped, whereas academic knowledge is frequently more narrowly defined. This led to problems when sufficient scoping work was not undertaken before projects got underway.

As a result, we began to understand that a key barrier to collaborative knowledge mobilisation is identifying—on both sides—the exact nature of the challenges that are being addressed, alongside the potential research questions that might help to overcome these. Our team has developed an innovative workshop methodology to address this issue. Facilitated by INE staff, these ‘Defining the Challenge’ workshops bring together policy and decisionmakers with academics and other experts to agree clear parameters, focus and priorities for emerging policy challenges. Informal feedback from policymakers already demonstrates that they have found these workshops to be extremely valuable, and that the process of working with INE is not only having an impact on their policy decisions but is in fact evolving their own project management practice.

This paper will present the preliminary findings from a more formalised series of focus groups and interviews exploring the effectiveness of the Defining the Challenge workshops against our hypothesis that they will improve relationship-building; clarify the questions under scrutiny by the policymaker; and lead to more defined and impactful outputs from projects. This case study aims to determine whether the specific practices and approaches adopted during INE’s three-year demonstrator phase can be defined as ‘successful’, and whether the unit is thus meeting its stated aim to ‘develop methods for delivering actionable insights to the region’s policymakers’. Our findings will be useful for other knowledge mobilisers looking to develop their practice across a range of geographies and policy areas.

P15 / Evidence use: empirical insights on practices and impact of knowledge mobilisation on decision-making

Chair : Hannah Durrant (Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University)

Second Chair : Eleanor MacKillop (Cardiff University)

Third Chair : James Downe (Cardiff University)

Session 4International case studies of knowledge mobilisation practice 2

Thursday, July 3rd 10:15 to 12:15 (B8)

Discussants

James Downe (Cardiff University)

How Knowledge Brokering Organisations have impact: An evaluation framework and case studies of UK What Works Centres

Eleanor MacKillop (Cardiff University)

James Downe (Cardiff University)

Over the last two decades, there has been a growth worldwide in the number of organisations working at the boundary of evidence and policy/practice seeking to broker evidence. In some cases, this is happening at the same time as government advisory functions becoming hollowed out. As more and more investments are being diverted towards these organisations, it is important to examine what impact they are having on policy and practice.

There is huge variation in what these knowledge brokering organisations do, how they work, who with and their aims. We focus on a specific set of these organisations, the UK What Works Centres (WWCs). These centres aim to generate, synthesise, broker and/or help implement evidence in areas such as improving educational attainment or eradicating homelessness.

This paper has two main aims. Although a lot has been written on knowledge brokering, it is less clear what impact it has and how we might capture or assess that impact. The first aim is therefore to test a framework for capturing the impact of knowledge brokering activities, going beyond instrumental impact to include capacity building, relationship building, and conceptual impact. The second aim is to analyse the impact of four UK WWCs on policy and practice, using interviews with staff and stakeholders as well as documentary analysis.

This paper contributes to current research on the impact of knowledge brokering by applying a framework which brings together tools and methods from the literature, for brokers to evaluate themselves, and that goes beyond metrics. We also aim to highlight the importance of context when it comes to determining whether knowledge brokering has an impact.

(Virtual) Reflections on the use of evidence at the city level: A case study of The London Assembly’s Environment Committee

Veronica Qin Ting Li (University College London, University of London)

Carla Washbourne (University of Warwick)

Since the 1990s, the UK government has claimed that evidence-based policymaking (EBPM) would help to improve performance while reducing costs (Hood & Dixon, 2015). Organisations, jobs, funding, and formal processes have been established to boost capacity for EBPM at multiple governance levels (Boaz et al., 2008). Nonetheless, scholars point out that variables such as politics, time pressure, and access to evidence can affect the UK government’s capacity to effectively and robustly process and utilise evidence

for policy (Rose et al., 2020; Stevens, 2011). The presence of these factors raises the question as to whether the UK has genuinely made “better use of evidence and research in policy making” (Cabinet Office, 1999, para 6) to achieve its policy goals.

This question is complex to answer for local energy policy, for which there are additional barriers to EBPM. For one, evidence-based decarbonisation strategies may not align with public opinion. For another, national guidance may not align with the knowledge and data of local authorities (Pearce, 2014). To further complicate matters, local governance is constrained by its administrative capacities and remit under national governance (Keirstead, 2010), as well as practical considerations such as deadlines for consensus (Rydin et al., 2018). Given these limitations, it would be meaningful to investigate how local energy policies are prioritised, formulated, and designed, and whether evidence is effectively used to meet community needs.

The purpose of this ongoing study is to uncover the black box of processes and norms regarding how evidence is used to set energy policy priorities at the city level. We refer to The London Assembly’s Environment Committee and its surrounding policy environment as a case study. The London Assembly serves to evaluate the policy decisions of the city Mayor and make policy recommendations accordingly. Using several of the Committee’s energy-related scrutiny reports as our data sources, we search the documents for citations and mentions of evidence. We then use Environment Committee meeting transcripts that were mentioned in the reports to cross-check the use of evidence for the reports. Finally, we thematically code semi-structured qualitative interviews with former and present Environment Committee members, scrutiny managers, research officers, and policy analysts, as well as collaborators in the Greater London Authority and knowledge brokering organisations.

Through this coding exercise, we open the black box to reveal how energy issues become part of the Environment Committee’s agenda, how stakeholders and knowledge brokers are involved in the evidence collection process, how The London Assembly synthesises the evidence, and how consensus or dissent over conclusions drawn from evidence are managed. We hope that the results of our analysis will bring insights into what works in local EBPM and what can be improved.

Moving or Maintaining Expertise: The Value of Retaining Policy Expertise in the Everyday Making of Policies

Lindsey Garner-Knapp (University of Sussex)

Joanna Mason (University of Sydney)

How public sector officials utilise evidence is frequently steeped in normative arguments that align with the evidence-based policy debate, as if the policy suggestions and choices would be self-evident given any evidence. Less frequently this issue is regarded as akin to a process of knowledge acquisition and mobilisation during which knowledge moves into and circulates within public sector institutions while being enabled by – and constituting – the expertise of officials, their everyday operational practices, and the organisation forms in which they are embedded. Framed this way, debate focuses attention to the capacity of public sector institutions to meet the growing complexity of societal challenges, and discussion shifts to how a loss of institutional knowledge can be addressed and a closer look at institutional and policy boundaries which are encountered during policymaking and their relationship to the successful mobilisation of policy-relevant knowledge. Focusing on the institutions rather than the people doing everyday policy work, solutions would target rules and procedures over the value of policy professionals and the unique contributions, expertise, and institutional knowledge they bring to policy making. Bringing this together we ask: Are there practices within governments that have positive impacts on the way knowledge in retained or moved around the institution?

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with government institutions and policymakers in the UK, Canada and Australia, this paper explores such practices. Featuring the disparate worlds of trade policy and Indigenous policy, this paper delves into how policy expertise is valued to examine how knowledge becomes institutionally embedded and the contribution this makes to how policies are made. Steeped in an interpretive and processual approach to studying policymaking formed through the lived, but hybridised, experience of the authors as policy practitioners and researchers in these settings, this paper argues for the importance of generating and retaining context-embedded policy knowledge as antidote for a lack of policy learning over time and poor retention of policy history. In other words, we argue that policy-specific expertise ought to be recognised and promoted within these governments over the current ethos of policy ‘generalist’ practices whereby policy staff are encouraged to ‘move out to move up’ the promotion ladder. Presenting empirical findings and short ethnographic vignettes, this paper demonstrates (1) how the movement of policy professionals from one team creates a significant institutional knowledge gap even if the professional moves within the same government, and (2) how building an institutional ‘culture of continuous learning’ provides an environment for practitioners to generate knowledge and expertise within discrete policy teams

through a combination of having opportunity to build relevant insights and perspectives to their policy work, and a fostering of mindset, or informal means for practitioners to apply policy insights, understandings and perspectives to their work. Drawing on these disparate policy settings but finding similarities in the ‘generalist approach’ to policy workers offers opportunities and strategies to improve policymaking by adopting a ‘policy expertise approach’ to foster institutional memory and improved policymaking processes.