

# POLICY-RESEARCH LINKAGES



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*St. Charles Bridge, Prague (Czech Republic).*

## Policy Relevance

Policy relevance is a defining principle for the MOST Programme. Yet what it means and how to achieve it may seem elusive. Policy questions are not, as such, research questions, and research questions are usually related in very indirect ways to the concerns of policy-makers. What is required is a bridge between the questions, making it possible to formulate a common agenda that makes genuine sense both to researchers and to policy-makers.

A wide range of experience shows how difficult this bridging exercise is. Despite extensive investment in social science research, the policy dividends are disappointing, and although different political and research systems go about it rather differently, it is hard to point to clear differences in success. We still do not adequately understand the practical conditions that might encourage policy-makers to attend to research results. Activities within the MOST Programme focusing on policy-research linkages aim at closing the gap between the knowledge embodied in first-quality social science research and the actions taken by international agencies, governments, and NGOs, in pursuit of social transformation.

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<http://www.unesco.org/most/weiss.htm>

The project, which is designed and implemented jointly by the MOST Programme and by Harvard University, addresses the frequent disregard of the findings of sound research and evaluation in the making of social policy. It will attempt to correlate policy utilization of research results with:

- the research and the researchers who conduct it,
- modes of dissemination or linkage between researchers and the policy arena,
- potential user groups, and
- the political domain of the research.

It will thus help research sponsors and researchers to conceive, conduct, and disseminate research in ways that increase the likelihood that policy audiences will pay attention.

### USE AND MISUSE OF RESEARCH

Much social research is conducted with the avowed purpose of influencing policy decisions. Much of it (although by no means all) is thoughtfully done with careful attention to appropriate social science theories and valid research methods. Yet a sizeable fraction of it never influences the audiences for which it was meant. Despite more than twenty-five years of research on “knowledge utilization” (KU), clear answers have not emerged about the reasons for certain outcomes. A major factor in such discrepancies is differences in definition and in methodology, including disagreements about the very meaning of “utilization”. Many policy uses of research are clearly in some sense misuses, but how is one to assess what kinds of use are “appropriate”? The emphasis in the project on the characteristics of the research and its context is one way of trying to judge whether policy-relevance refers to a kind of research, defined in substantive terms, or rather to a kind of interface, defined procedurally.

The project will proceed by systematically surveying available documents and by conducting interviews with actors at all points on the research-policy interface. In each case-study, quantitative and other documentary data will be combined with the narrative accounts from the interviews in order to reconstruct the “story” of the confrontation of the research with the debate and negotiation in the issue-arena.

# Factors that Improve the Use of Research in Social Policy Case Studies

## CONVEYING RECOMMENDATIONS

International agencies and national governments are seeking to reduce poverty and develop national capacities to cope with the social problems of the 21st century. Many sponsor social science research to help them chart appropriate and feasible courses of action. Nonetheless, experience shows that policies often ignore, or even contradict, the recommendations of high-quality research. With a view to addressing this problem, the project will disseminate its results widely in order to reach both researchers who undertake studies intended to have a policy impact and research funders who support such studies, as well as the policy communities themselves. Furthermore, consideration will be given to developing training programs for specific groups of research users, such as upper-level bureaucrats, legislators, programme managers, and journalists. If the findings point to fruitful lessons for such audiences, collaborative work with the MOST staff will be undertaken to develop training that appeals to the particular interests of each group and conveys the major messages of our case studies.

The case study proposed in the United States is offered as a model for the kind of research to be undertaken in the project, which covers 35 countries (see <http://www.unesco.org/most/weiss2.htm> for a full list).

## US CASE STUDY

The study, directed by Professor Carol Weiss (Graduate School of Education, Harvard University) will involve follow-up evaluation of the Comprehensive Child Development Programme (CCDP). The initial evaluation was a five-year random experiment evaluating a nationwide programme of comprehensive services to young children and families in troubled homes. It included long term follow-up, standardized measures, interviews and observations, and sophisticated statistical analysis.

The main finding of the report issued last year, was that while the young children and families improved on a number of dimensions, they did not improve any more than did a randomly selected control group. CCDP had no specific statistically measurable impact. The CCDP programme has now expired. In its place, Congress has legislated the Early Head Start Program. Initial indications suggest that it is reproducing the characteristics, and thereby presumably also the defects, of CCDP.

The study will examine the impact of the evaluation on the development of the Early Head Start Program. The objective is to find out whether officials at all levels have heard about the findings, how much credence they give them, and whether the findings have raised questions or modified their agenda for future legislation.

## EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT OF MOST RESEARCH ON POLICY-MAKING

### 1. Strategies for managing transformation risks in Central and Eastern Europe project:

The results of the study on long-term unemployment in the city of Pernik in Bulgaria were taken into account in the course of designing the EU PHARE project for alleviating the effects of unemployment in coal mining and metallurgical regions. The local decision-makers in Pernik used the results for the preparation of their Strategy for the development of the municipality.

### 2. Coping with transformation processes in Circumpolar regions project:

Decision-making has been influenced through understanding and awareness of the interplay between local, national and transnational actors. Local actors such as mayors have initiated new development projects inspired by local practices in other countries, and the international focus on local development has stimulated

new interest (for example in Teriberka in Murmansk Region, Russia). Successful examples include:

- the establishment of the Centre on Local and Regional Development in the Faroes with combined support from home rule and local government;
- the increased awareness of the strength of local multiple strategies in Storjord, Northern Norway;
- the awareness of the problems and potentials in tourism development in Uummannaq and Ilulissat (Greenland).

### 3. Growing Up in Cities Project:

The Mayor of Greater Johannesburg, Isaac Mogase, declared the project a "milestone" in the Plan of Action for children in this city. As a result of the project, children and parents started to participate in local development committees and take initiatives vis-à-vis local authorities. They have also started to implement some of the project's action proposals, together with the MOST team.

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14	Monitoring of Ethnicity, Conflicts and Cohesion
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18	Indigenous Knowledge
20	Ethno-Net Africa (ENA)
22	The E-Journal on Multicultural Societies
	<b>Urban Issues</b>
24	International Project on City Words
27	Growing Up in Cities Project (GUIC)
28	Cities, the Environment and Social Relations between Men and Women
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32	Cities: Management of Social Transformations and the Environment
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*Bio notes of MOST Secretariat and International Project Coordinators are interspersed throughout this issue.*