Social Sciences and Humanities Research and STI Policy-Making in Latin America: a Nexus Perception Study

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Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project   Conocimiento, tecnología y desigualdad social View project

Project   Red temática para mejorar el diálogo entre las comunidades involucradas en las políticas de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación/Thematic network to enhance the dialogue between the communities involved in STI policy View project

SSH research and STI policy-making in Latin America:
A nexus perception study
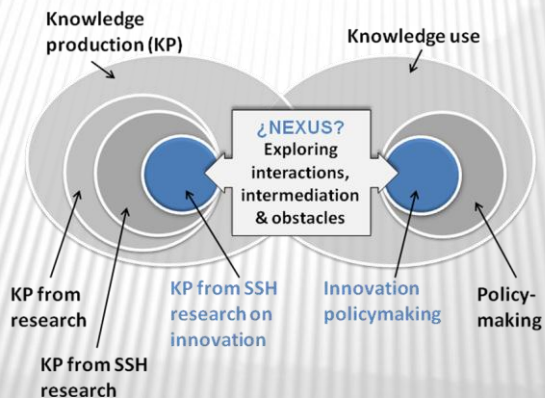
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1

Object of the study

Stylised representation of the interface to be analysed

Knowledge production (KP) — Knowledge use

¿NEXUS? Exploring interactions, intermediation & obstacles

KP from research — KP from SSH research on innovation — Innovation policymaking — Policy-making

KP from SSH research

2

METHODOLOGY

3

- ❑ Literature review (post 2004 typologies' review)
- ❑ 54 interviews (2009-2010)
  - ▪ to 38 SSH researchers (groups) working on innovation
  - ▪ to 16 PM involved in STI policy design
- ❑ Country coverage:
  - ▪ LA: Mexico (8 interviews), Venezuela (8), Uruguay (7), Brazil (6), Argentina (4), Chile (4), Colombia (3), Costa Rica (2), Cuba (1).
  - ▪ Also some outside LA: USA (3), Spain (2), Denmark (1), UK (1), Netherlands (1), Sweden (1).
- ❑ Perception study
  - ▪ main source of information is thought and experience of a group of selected people
- ❑ Semi-structured interviews
  - ▪ often lasted for more than one hour
- ❑ Use of qualitative data analysis program (Atlas.ti)

4

RESEARCH INFLUENCE
ON POLICY-MAKING

5

❑ <u>All</u> research groups intend or pretend influencing policy:

- ▪ "Essentially, the idea of the group is to generate information and applied research that is useful for decision-taking by government authorities and also at the international level."

- ▪ "... an impact through generating elements that allow the government to improve the functioning of the STI policy tools. Clearly, one has this pretension."

- ▪ "We spend our lives studying the rationality of different STI actors, so we wish to have an influence..."

6

❑ <u>All</u> researchers report some influence of their work

- Perception is that impact is: not clear-cut; mainly intangible, built up through time and many actors; highly dependant on the particular institutional and political context of the moment.

❑ The type of influence reported is:

- **mainly** conceptual, of a 'percolating' nature

- **often** through movement of persons from academia to policy and viceversa ('embodied knowledge')

- **sometimes** instrumental (commissioned studies, a couple of regional, collective initiatives: Bogota Manual; STI indicators by RICYT Iberoamerican network).

7

❑ Nothing really new, confirms what Weiss argued several decades ago:

- "The process is not one of linear order from research to decision but a disorderly set of interconnections and back-and-forthness that defies neat diagrams" (Weiss, 1979).

8

INPUTS CONSIDERED
IN STI POLICY

9

INPUT OPTIONS	A*	B**
Personal knowledge and experience of PM	69%	38%
Outcomes of deliberations between researchers and PM	59%	38%
Working lines or financing of international organisations	49%	33%
Sector-based studies and diagnoses, and their policy lessons	49%	21%
Analysis or conclusions from committees on specific issues	46%	18%
Budget negotiations at the national level (resources for STI)	41%	18%
Personal or political interests of PM	36%	31%
Pressures from advocacy groups, interest groups or lobbies	31%	15%
Outcomes of action projects carried out by the government or NGO	23%	8%
Publications of research outcomes (any science)	23%	10%
Quantitative data from surveys or similar	21%	13%
Others	15%	8%
Prospective studies	13%	3%
Public opinion	5%	0%

*A: option marked as one of the 5 most important inputs as % of sample number (39).
 B: option marked as one of the 2 most important inputs as % of sample number (39).

Comments (1)

❑ "Personal knowledge and experience of the PM", most often cited input, sometimes accompanied by pejorative observations of researchers

- ▪ "In this country we all feel inspired!"

- ▪ "A decision taken by a PM is much more based on what he thinks than on studies"

- ▪ "Personal knowledge and experience, yes, but presently it has to be understood as "lack of" knowledge and experience."

11

Comments (2)

❑ Two most often cited items as main inputs:

- ▪ "Personal knowledge and experience of PM"

- ▪ "Outcomes of deliberations between researchers and PM"

❑ Especially in the case of PM: 79% of interviewees marked each of these items among the 5 most important

❑ This, again, shows the importance of knowledge "embodied in people" over written forms of knowledge

12

Comments (3)

❑ "Working lines and financing of international organisations"

- most often marked item by <u>researchers</u> among 2 most important (no so much by PM...)
- often associated with similarity of policy tools in all LA countries
- somehow relates to 'mimetic' behaviour of the South with respect to the North, as F. Suarez used to say:

North: Time1: a real need emerges; Time2: a solution is designed
LA: Time1: the Northern solution is copied; Time2: ¿what was it really for?

13

Comments (4)

❑ However, "Sector-based studies and diagnoses, and their policy lessons" are highly valued by PM

❑ "Pressures from advocacy groups, interest groups or lobbies"

- PM mostly disregard this as an input, while 40% of researchers marked it as one of the five most important inputs (excluding advocacy groups).

❑ "Public opinion": practically inexistent

❑ "Quantitative data from surveys or similar" has a very moderate ranking ,the same as "scientific publications (any science)".

14

OBSTACLES TO NEXUS IN RESEARCHERS' VIEW

15

16
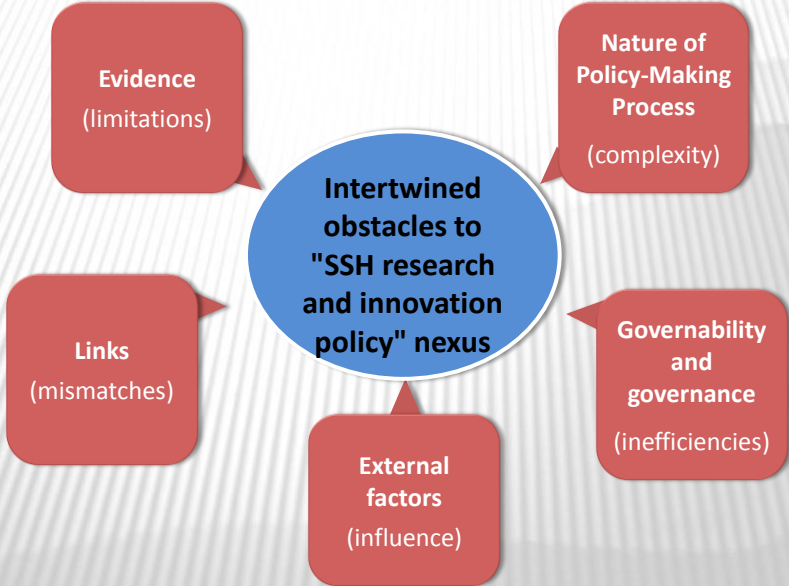
Some examples (1)

- ❑ Research (limitations)
  - Insufficient interdisciplinary approaches (economicist view).
  - Research agenda fixing is auto-referential
  - Lack of critical mass of research groups, visible as valid interlocutors in innovation issues
- ❑ R-P links (mismatches)
  - Research supply and demand run in parallels with relatively few crossing points
  - Typical communications problems ('two communities problem'): differences in language, timing, interests and incentive systems
- ❑ Nature of political process
  - Many answers reflected some 'powerlessness' feeling of researchers in front of the very nature of policy

17

Some examples (2)

- ❑ Governability and governance issues
  - Disarticulation of policies at the national level (between macro/sectorial levels and innovation policies, "one sector-based policy contradicts another", etc.)
  - Weakness of rules and norms determining the participation and interactions of different social actors (e.g., citizens' participation)
  - Uneven access of researchers' groups to basic information: primary data are not treated as public goods ("you need to know people who own them").

18

Some examples (3)

❑ Influence of external factors

- ▪ "We do what others have done as if our problems were the same"

Hirschman (1975):

"… understanding of a problem and motivation to attack it are two necessary inputs into policy-making and problem-solving, but … the timing of these two ingredients could be significantly out of phase: understanding can pace motivation… but in other situations motivation to solve a problem may arise in advance of adequate understanding. The latter situation … is characteristic of Latin American countries to the extent that they import 'solutions' from the outside … This typically 'dependent' behaviour results, of course, in frustration precisely because these institutions are often established without the minimal understanding of the problems they are set up to resolve."

19

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUNTRIES (LA)

20

Modes of articulation between SSR and policy

❑ *Arm's length*: SSR and PM work at a distance (±Venezuela)
- Gibbons' mode 1 of knowledge production
- Non negociated research agenda, not much influenced by PM needs. Research outcomes understated as policy inputs.

❑ *Hands-on:* strong connection between research agenda and innovation policy (± Brazil)
- People moving from academia to policy with questions, demands, concepts and proposals, and vice versa.
- Diverse communication channels (think-thanks, meetings, research projects on information needed por policy design, effective communication of results, etc.)

❑ *Connected distance*: each community has its own logic but there are bridges (± Argentina, México, Costa Rica).

21

Innovative context and path dependence

❑ Context matters: PM are bound by resources, interests affected, supporters and opponents, previous decisions, etc.

❑ National innovative context: is most relevant for the nexus
- 'Hands-on' mode of articulation in Brazil: partly explained by national agreement on the importance of innovation for the country's future.
- 'Connected distance' in Argentina: could partly be due to historical high weight of natural scientists in STI policy design.
- 'Connected distance' in Uruguay could stem from historically low priority of STI: present growing political importance faces a weak tradition of dialoguing.
- 'Arm's length' mode in Venezuela: atmosphere of political intransigence makes relationships more difficult than before.

22

LOOKING AT NEXUS' OBSTACLES SPECIFIC TO STI FIELD

23

More 'hands-on' mode of articulation

- ❑ Requires devising institutional tools (collective agenda building is an urgent need)
- ❑ As we saw, this implies changing the innovative context.

  ➡ Not just improving communication or 'two communities' problem

24

No critical mass of STI research in LA

- Low research connectivity at national level: research is scattered; researchers look for their peers in the North.

- No tradition of joint or complementary work between innovation groups in SSH in LA.

- Knowledge accumulates in different fields of "innovation & development" with few mechanisms to integrate and articulate the pieces of the puzzle towards the building of a Latin American vision of development (distinguishing between countries' specificities)

- ➡ No wonder PM look at Northern frameworks of thought

25

Knowledge on demand to orient supply

- Interviews to PM confirm they need more information on demands from different actors, that could be addressed through innovation policies/tools.

- This lack of knowledge obstructs the design of effective innovation promotional tools, <u>and</u> makes difficult for PM to define and communicate research needs to academia.

- To design performing policies PM should be well informed on the following (non exclusive) 5 aspects, that are addressed in varying degrees by LA countries:

26

1. Innovative performance and absorptive capacities of firms (shortcomings of indicators presently inquired on in innovation surveys)

2. Overall STI capacities of the country

3. Technological needs of the production sectors and other actors (not asked in present innovation surveys)

4. Strategic knowledge or STI foresight

5. what people think, value and fear about STI

27

Brokerage

❑ Emphasis in the recent past has been on articulation within the National Innovation System between research and firms

❑ But little attention has been devoted in LA to the needed intermediation between research and policy development:

- specialized think tanks

- social entrepreneurs (society's change agents)

- translators of research results

- facilitators (translate conflicts in specific interests, needs and concerns)

❑ Few of these institutional figures exist in LA.

❑ Researchers also need to acquire skills to influence policy.

28

Thank you!

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- Natalia Gras
- Isabel Bortagaray (1st phase)

29