Role of Evidence in the Formulation of European Public Health Policies

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Valorisation

This chapter presents the valorisation of this dissertation, which is “...the process of creating value from knowledge, by making knowledge suitable and available for societal and/or economic application and by transforming it into products, services, processes and new business”.

The use of evidence in policymaking is the subject itself of this dissertation. Research should not remain within the circles of the scientific community. It can be used to improve policymaking and elaborate sound, effective and balanced policies. This is particularly important for the formulation of public health policies as the use of research findings can contribute to create a healthier society. In this spirit, this chapter explains how the main results of this research study can be applied in practice, what added value they bring to researchers, policy makers and society. It concludes with a description of the actions that will be undertaken to disseminate the knowledge acquired during the research study.

Relevance for researchers

The finding of this thesis can be useful for the scientific community, namely for researchers in the field of EU and public health studies and those investigating the concept of evidence-based policy. These findings are also relevant for researchers of all disciplines who want their work to be used for policymaking and for those who want to use participant observation as a source for data collection.

Researchers in the field of EU studies can adapt the theoretical framework developed in this thesis for analyzing policymaking in other areas. This research also adds new insights on how the European Commission deals with evidence and offers an empirical description of the policy process useful for future research on lobbying theories, network analysis, advocacy coalitions and EU governance.

This dissertation advances the study and understanding of public health policies by shedding lights on how they are formulated at European level, who are the main actors involved and which are the main drivers.

This research also contributes to the rich field of science concerned with studying the concept of evidence-based policy. More specifically, this research endorses a wider definition of evidence which includes not only research but also other types of evidence. In addition, this research takes into account a wider perspective, investigating the views of policymakers,
stakeholders and researchers on the use of research evidence. It also offers a more nuanced approach than that of surveys using a comparative case studies analysis and provides experiences from the EU dimension.

This research study also offers a learning tool for all those researchers who wish their work to be used in the EU policymaking process. It does this by explaining the importance of learning the “rules of the game” to know more about how the process works and to tailor research to policymakers needs, both in terms of content and in terms of how their findings are presented (lengths, technical language). It also explains that policy makers’ need for information might be unpredictable and within a very short time frame that doesn’t allow proper scientific research rigor. This may help preventing researchers from feeling frustrated if their research is not used by policy makers. Moreover, it raises researcher’s awareness on the fact that their research can be used selectively and used as ammunition by policy makers or stakeholders to serve their needs. Lastly, it offers them a basis for reflection to decide whether they want to play an active role and make sure, their work is used for policy purposes at the risk of being biased or if they prefer to maintain full academic independence, decide on the research agenda, find alternative funding and just publish their studies.

Finally, the research study adds new insights also about the strengths and the weaknesses of participant observation as a data collection tool and thus can be useful for all those researchers who intend to use this as a method for data collection.

Relevance for policy makers and society

This thesis brings an added value to policy makers by offering them a comprehensive external analysis on what constitutes evidence in the formulation of European public health policy, on how it is sourced and used and on how the most affected stakeholders perceive the policy process. Policy makers can use it as checklist to verify whether they have applied (or not) the principles of the EU Better Regulation Agenda. It can be used to identify what can and should be improved and can help preventing policy mistakes and improving policy outcomes. From the results of the research, policy makers can also draw suggestions to make the process more efficient and transparent.

The dissertation adds value also to European citizens by providing them a learning tool on how the European public health policies are developed, on the information policy makers use to define them and on who
influences the policy process and how. It also shows how and to what extent citizens views expressed in Eurobarometer surveys are taken into account. EU legislative and non-legislative initiatives in the field of public health have a direct impact on the health of all 500 million European citizens and it is in the interest of citizens to know how these initiatives are developed and on which basis policy makers choose one provision over another.

The principle of evidence-based policy is a cornerstone of democracy and it is now being challenged by the proliferation of disinformation and fake news. This thesis offers policy makers and society a basis of information and reflection to defend this principle and implement it more effectively for better policies. The publication of an in-depth analysis on how European policies are formulated also contributes to making EU policy makers accountable towards European citizens.

Dissemination of knowledge

To inform the scientific community, copies of the dissertations will be sent to researchers working in the field of evidence-based policy whose findings have been referred to also in this dissertation.

To inform policy makers, copies of this dissertation will be sent to senior policy makers in the European Commission including the DG Secretariat General, DG SANTE, DG GROWTH, DG RESEARCH and to the members of the Impact Assessment Board. Copies will also be sent to the Joint Research Center, which is the European Commission's science and knowledge service.

Furthermore, copies of the dissertations will be sent to the European Parliament (ENVI committee members and secretariat), the Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) Panel, the health attaches of the Member States Permanent Representations to the EU as well as to the main stakeholders in the EU public health community (NGOs, patients and consumers organizations, health care professionals’ organizations, food and health care industry associations).

Links to the dissertation and to the summary will also be shared on the researcher’s Linkedin and Twitter account (total outreach 2,263 people) which include mostly EU and national policy makers and stakeholders working in the field of EU health policy.
Furthermore, to inform policy makers and stakeholders outside the EU bubble, the dissertation, the abstract and the summary will be sent to the Alliance for Useful Evidence. This is a network, hosted by the UK’s innovation charity Nesta. The Alliance champions the smarter use of evidence in social policy and practice and provides an open access network of more than 4,300 individuals from across government, universities, charities, businesses, and local authorities in the UK and internationally. They will also be shared with the campaigning charity Sense about Science, which works on the misrepresentation of science and evidence in public life.

Finally, to reach citizens and the wider public interested in EU politics, the dissertation will be shared with some selected journalists interested in EU politics (e.g. Politico) and health issues.