



Jean Monnet/ECSA Conference 2014

The future of EU studies

Brussels, 1 & 2 October

Working Group 2

EU studies: feeding results in to policy making

Working group rationale

25 years of Jean Monnet projects have created a large network of highly competent experts, mostly in disciplines related to economics, law, social and political sciences. The Jean Monnet network covers now 77 countries. 800 Universities offer Jean Monnet courses. The Jean Monnet programme has supported more than 4 000 projects and some 1 700 Jean Monnet professors reach out to some 265 000 students every year.

The Jean Monnet network has succeeded in promoting excellence in teaching and research in EU studies. However, compared to its size, contacts and co-operation between academia specialised in EU studies and policy developers has been rather anecdotal than the rule. The potential this powerful network offers and the use of its research results in informed and evidence-based policy-making, has so far remained underexploited.

This WG will discuss what kind of input EU studies could provide to policy development, and the best form in which this research could be planned and organised for developing, shaping and making policy on European subject matters in the different fora concerned. This working group will therefore bring together academics dealing with EU studies, representatives of think tanks and political decision-makers from different levels of government.

Synthesis of panellists points for discussion

As the EU policy areas expand, so does the need for EU experts – in different walks of life

The need for study of European integration has become an important goal in itself. EU support for this has been a major factor in the interest in this academic area.

The European Union is a unique political entity, constantly evolving. It has itself created a need for specialists in Europe. These specialists became practitioners within public administrations, the private sector, and civil society. Their background led to new policies which have taken integration further, thus creating more need for specialists. In this way the expansion of EU policy areas went in tandem with the growth in EU studies.

While this was first seen in EU Member States, a similar process is apparent in candidate countries such as Turkey. Debate on accession and participation in European programmes has boosted interest in EU study programmes and research. Interest is high in other parts of the world too.

EU research and individuals with this study background can only effectively contribute to policy-making if the research or study programmes are themselves of high quality. This should be a focus of the group – how to assess programmes, and translate scientific excellence into good policy.

The specific role that think tanks can play

A time of crisis – when the "business-as-usual" route for policy making may no longer be feasible – can increase the influence that think tanks may have. A think tank will have to have established itself in advance as a credible and recognised partner.

Ideas are fed into the policy-making circuit mainly through papers posted on the web. Advisors to policy-makers read these policy advice papers: the process is helped if there is a forum for contact between advisors and think tanks.

The role of academics and their research as a source of policy advice

For policy-makers, are academics neutral providers of information, strategic thinkers, or experts somewhere in-between?

Ideally, policy-making needs to be evidence-based in a time of increasing complexity. But the reality of the political system means that other – less rational – concerns influence the policy choices.

The Commission – as a neutral agenda-setter – relies on wide networks of expert committees, agencies, working groups etc. The Commission is conscious of the need to manage quality and transparency of these groups. EU funding itself supports these networks and the contact between them.

The impact of EU studies experts would appear to be more on the technical advice they can provide on complex issues. The impact appears to be less on the actual agenda-setting level and when it comes to implementation and evaluation.

The Jean Monnet community can act as a link between the academic sector and other stakeholders.

Specialist agencies feeding into policy-making. An example: the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The Agency's analysis provides a solid and extensive knowledge base in key areas in the field of special needs and inclusive education.

Results from Agency projects can contribute to the achievement of the objectives for education and training agreed by the European Ministers of education.

The Agency can also carry out evidence-based meta-analysis of countries' policies on inclusive education

All these feed into European objectives under ET 2020. The Agency also monitors developments in this area in the international (UN) context.

Panellists

Moderator: Simon TAYLOR, European Voice

Natasa	BESIREVIC	University of Zagreb, Croatia
Meltem	MÜFTÜLER-BAÇ	Jean Monnet Chair, Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey
Daniel	GROS	Director, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels
Victoria	SORIANO	Deputy Director, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Summary of discussions

The workshop discussions focused very much on the role of research and researchers, and particularly on whether academic research should (always?) play a think-tank role, generating data or advice that can be fed into policy-making – be this by politicians, corporate decision-makers or players in civil society.

There is not so much demand from think tanks during the regular decision-making calendar, when it's "business as usual" but recent European crises have shown there is more attention paid to the role think tanks can play – and in particular the trans-national view they can give. This said, the EU contribution to think tanks is minimal. Almost all reputed research organisations are national and therefore adopt a national perspective.

It is important when considering policy options to recognise that there is a gap between legislation and the actual situation on the ground. Particularly if a law requires changes in practice, then researchers need a good picture of not only the legal situation, but also of practice, and what can be done to change it.

"Research is not a panacea. It's not only academic research that provides answers. It is often also civil society."

Some participants felt that Jean Monnet projects should be structured around a "think tank approach" where there is a clear link to policy, and particular attention paid to a group of stakeholders.

"Are we relevant as a Jean Monnet community?"

"If our knowledge is not used, what do we stand for, and what is our purpose in being Jean Monnet professors?"

Other participants were of a different view: that academic research should not lose its independence, and that research should not be assessed solely on the basis of its policy value. History has shown that great deal of research is often not recognised as "useful" at the time it is carried out, but its value becomes clear much later.

"Jean Monnet professors are not there to influence but to teach."

Participants also recognised the need to look outside the Jean Monnet community. Here it was questioned whether academics in general were sufficiently aware of the EU policy-making process for their research to be useful to policy-makers. It was also remarked that the nature of the EU means that policy is influenced at different levels – local, national, European – and in different contexts – administrative, legislative and judicial.

Participants also recognised the fact that an academic's agenda and the logic of their approach might not match the political agenda or decision-making context, where there are many political factors at play.

"There are positions which as academics we would say are not reasonable, but which are politically necessary. And there we are out of the game."

Another potential impact of Jean Monnet activities on policy-making comes not from the research it produces, but from the long-term impact of its core activities – educating citizens in the European integration aspects of their area of study or their (future) profession. This is not a purely academic exercise, but one central for the entire European project: raising awareness of the relevance and credibility of Europe by speaking both to hearts as well as minds.

Sharing results: Proposals

The discussion turned to the availability of the results of Jean Monnet projects – both for policy-makers, but also for other players who could benefit from these findings. One proposal was for the EU to provide grants to established think tanks to evaluate outputs from Jean Monnet projects?

One problem here is the sheer range and variety of individual Jean Monnet projects, making it difficult to draw conclusions. So cluster workshops could be organised on key themes. Or project stakeholders could be invited to each other's workshops and events to disseminate results. Another proposal was to the EU to fund grants for young people to attend conferences on EU integration. Participants were also reminded that all beneficiaries of EU funding – especially under Erasmus+ - have an obligation to make the results of their activities more widely known.

The JM Community should make more use of the on-line resources available to share good practice and research results. We should not be shy of using the media to amplify the results of research. We should not as academics act as a form of advance journalism, but we can work with media to disseminate thinking.

One participant raised the importance of countering mis-information on the EU in the current political climate. Here the importance of educating about Europe at school could play an important role.

Main conclusions

- Participants acknowledged the contribution that Jean Monnet activities can make to policy-making. The workshop focused on research, but also touched on the importance of educating current or potential future policy-makers on the European dimension of their sector
- It was also stressed that, while academics are well-placed to play an advisory role for policy-makers, this should not compromise their independence.

- Results of research can be valuable to policy-makers.
- More needs to be done to promote the results of projects – both individually and collectively. This could be done through meetings and work with information relays.
- One example would be to organise an event focusing on innovative ideas such as the CEPS Idea Lab held in April 2014, which discussed new thinking in key areas for European integration.