

Summary: Finnish Science-for-Policy Ecosystem

A Decentralised Network of Actors

Finland's approach to science-policy interaction is distinctive, operating as a **complex network of relationships** rather than through centralised formal structures. As a nation of 5.6 million people, Finland has developed an ecosystem that relies on distributed connections rather than hierarchical frameworks such as Chief Scientific Advisor systems.

This network encompasses a diverse array of institutions: 13 universities, 22 Universities of Applied Sciences, 12 Government Research Institutes operating in seven administrative sectors, and other key actors, such as the Research Council of Finland, Strategic Research Council of Finland, science panels, boundary organisations, and numerous ad hoc working groups and task forces.

According to the OECD, Finland has established relatively robust foundations for science-policy dialogue, and it has pioneered innovative instruments for connecting knowledge producers, users and intermediaries. This places Finland among the forerunners in creating mechanisms for evidence-informed policymaking.²

Terminology: Science-policy interface can be understood as "social processes that involve relationships between scientists and other actors in policymaking, enabling exchanges, co-evolution, and the joint construction of knowledge with the goal of enhancing decision-making."¹

Low Hierarchies and Relatively High Trust Enable Effective Cooperation

Finland has a strong tradition of integrating scientific research into the policymaking process. This stems in part from the features of modern Finland, including political stability, relatively high levels of trust in public institutions, and a robust culture of cooperation.³

Political stability allows for the development of longer-term relationships between scientific and policy communities, creating a foundation for more effective evidence-informed policymaking.

¹ Van den Hove, 2007: 807
² OECD, 2017
³ OECD, 2024

Despite Successes Challenges Remain

Science-policy practices remain mostly traditional, linear model of communication. This manifests as reactive exchanges or unsolicited research communication that rarely align directly with policy needs. In the absence of continuous interaction at the science-policy interface, participation and input from researchers can be sporadic, built on ad-hoc projects rather than more permanent institutional arrangements.

Limited use of researchers' expertise:

Between 2015-2023 when parliamentary committees requested expert statements, only 6.3% of them were directed to researchers.

Disciplinary imbalances in expert consultations:

Between 2015-2023 only 1% of the expert statements requested by parliamentary committees were from researchers in humanities.

Expert input is unevenly distributed:

Expert consultations tend to concentrate on a limited number of voices. During the period of 2015-2023, of the researchers giving expert statements to parliamentary committees most gave just one statement, whereas the median was two statements per researcher. This is in sharp contrast to the maximum, which reaches an astonishing 391 statements from a single individual.

Finland lacks harmonised terminology around evidence-informed policymaking, creating confusion in both policy and research communities. Terms such as science advice and knowledge brokering are often used interchangeably, with little acknowledgement of their distinct meanings.

Knowledge brokering remains institutionally underdeveloped and underutilised, relying heavily on project-based approaches rather than established structures. Many individuals perform brokering functions without formal identification as knowledge brokers, hindering collective learning and network formation. A promising development is the recent emergence of an informal network of brokers in Finland, forming an emerging community of practice.

The absence of central coordination mechanisms for science-policy interaction, while offering flexibility, creates challenges. The ecosystem lacks strategic coordination and communication among stakeholders when designing new programs, instruments, and institutions. This fragmentation leads to duplicated efforts, missed opportunities for synergy, and inconsistent approaches to incorporating scientific evidence in policy processes.

Three Key Pathways for Ecosystem Development

1. Leveraging knowledge brokering as a transformative force for change

Knowledge brokering remains underutilised, yet it could significantly reshape the science-for-policy landscape. It offers an accessible means of driving systemic change in the ecosystem by bridging the traditional divide between knowledge producers and users. Formally recognising and cultivating a community of brokers would develop a more integrated, effectively functioning ecosystem. Strengthening knowledge brokering capacities within organisations helps create a collaborative culture of evidence-informed policymaking.

2. Transforming the Research Community's Approach to Policy Engagement

Research community's approach to influencing policymaking must become more proactive, collaborative, and phenomenon-based. The current one-directional science communication practices that rely on individual researchers must evolve toward collaborative engagement that addresses policy challenges through phenomenon-based approaches rather than disseminating isolated research outputs. Knowledge brokers could facilitate this transition, redirecting pressure from individual researchers to specialists who can guide effective science-policy interaction.

3. Implementing Comprehensive Reform

Large-scale structural changes in the science-policy interface are overdue. While Finland's science-policy interface continuously evolves, current challenges and future developments, such as developments in AI, require deliberate collective action and structural changes in how science-policy engagement is organised.

Current improvement efforts remain largely uncoordinated and insufficient in scale. While the Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) sector has made important strides in collaborative strategic development, comparable discussions about Finland's science-for-policy ecosystem are notably absent. There is an urgent need for collective dialogue to establish a shared vision and strategic direction, enabling stakeholders to identify systemic bottlenecks and implement coordinated improvement measures.

Sources:

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