

# Public Policy Training and Academic Teaching: Some Insights from Europe



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# Overview of the Presentation



- Value and limitations of academic teaching
- Specific demands of the public policy community
- University study and professional training: separate worlds?
- Combining public policy training and university study – some insights from Europe
  - Teaching
  - Research
- Outlook: future perspectives for public policy training

# The Value of Academic Study



- Universities active in both teaching *and* research
- Academic freedom should provide independence from government instruction (but threatened by growing trend for issue-driven research funding)
- Academic research aims as discovering general patterns of behaviour
  - Facilitating the production of original knowledge
  - Providing a broader foundation for understanding social and political developments
- Academic study involves critical thinking
  - questioning existing 'truths'
  - Encouraging creativity
  - Strengthening civil society and democratic foundations

# The Limitations of Academic Teaching



- University study can be very abstract and not relate to current societal needs – the ‘Ivory Tower’ problem
- Strong emphasis on the development of theory and the testing of hypotheses makes it difficult to focus on the particularities of specific circumstances (e.g. particular countries, economic sectors or time periods)
- Students are not sufficiently prepared for the requirements of the labour market
- Without interaction with the ‘real world’, academic work can become self-referential and misguided
- The language of academic work might be esoteric and fail to engage the general public

# Demands of the Public Policy Community



- Need for insights into policy-making that can have an immediate and practical application
- Implications of research and recommendations for future policy-making need to be spelt out clearly
- Results of research need to be summarised succinctly both in oral presentations and written papers
- Particular focus on skills rather than purely substance
  - Academics engaging with public policy need to have specific skills aimed at the needs of policy-makers
    - ✦ Presentation skills
    - ✦ Writing skills
  - Graduates being prepared for public policy-making need to be trained in specific skills
    - ✦ Writing skills
    - ✦ Negotiating skills

# University Study and Public Policy Training: Separate Worlds?

## University Study

- Inherent link between teaching and research
- Aims at the discovery and dissemination of general patterns of behaviour
- Tendency to produce highly specialised and in-depth knowledge that is difficult to transfer
- Abstract learning that is potentially isolated from societal needs

## Public Policy Training

- Need to be familiar with the practical aspects of day-to-day policy-making
- Demand for explicit recommendations for future policy-making
- Need for quick reaction to changing circumstances and specific contexts
- Strong focus on skills training (presentation, writing, negotiation)

# Combining University Education and Public Policy Training: Some Insights from Europe



- **Teaching**

- Include skills training as an essential element of degree programmes (undergraduate, Masters, doctoral)
- Using simulations and similar exercises to expose students to realities of public policy decision-making (e.g. Council meetings in the EU)
- Facilitate internships within public institutions and consultancies as part of the curriculum
- Study trips to public institutions including meetings with officials
  - ✦ Better understanding of the nature of public policy making
  - ✦ Opportunities for networking to enhance chances in the job market
- Invite practitioners as guest lecturers in order to include ‘real world’ experiences in the curriculum
  - ✦ Occasional high profile lectures by politicians and senior officials
  - ✦ Regular courses taught by practitioners with academic background

# Combining University Education and Public Policy Training: Some Insights from Europe



- **Research**

- Consider the societal relevance of research findings and discuss ways of 'valorisation' afterwards
- Communicate findings in a comprehensible and succinct manner
  - ✦ Executive summaries of research reports
  - ✦ Policy papers and online publications alongside more traditional academic publications
  - ✦ Articles, interviews and opinion pieces in general media
- Facilitate interaction between academic researchers and policy-makers
  - ✦ Invite practitioners as discussants to workshops and conferences
  - ✦ Organise dedicated events bringing together academics and policy-makers
  - ✦ Use blogs and discussion forums to generate debate between research and practice

# Outlook: Perspectives for Public Policy Training



- **Important for universities to recognise the societal relevance of research and teaching**
  - Conducting research that is relevant and addresses current issues
  - Communicating research findings in an accessible manner
  - Training graduates with suitable skills for public policy making
- **Public policy training is best seen as a dedicated task linking academic study and the world of practice**
- **“It Takes Two to Tango”**: Public policy-makers need to be open to insights from academia and willing to engage with universities