

## **Water polo or hurdle race? Competing perceptions on science-policy interfaces from Central Eastern Europe**

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Synthesising diverse forms of knowledge in a transparent process and delivering easily digestible messages to policy-makers are considered the key steps to achieve policy impact through existing science-policy interfaces (SPIs). Who is a knowledge holder, what counts as evidence, and how diverse knowledges are accepted are institutionalized aspects of SPIs that have a central influence on policy by framing the interaction between participating actors. While formal rules governing the SPIs are usually transparent and meant to provide a ‘safe space’ for collaboration, informal norms – which are strongly embedded in socio-cultural contexts and therefore vary across countries and regions – have a much less visible but equally important impact on the process and the results.

This paper draws attention to specificities of science-policy interactions within the Central Eastern European context, especially as Eastern Europe is often considered relatively ‘inactive’ in global SPIs compared to other UN regions. I use an international (IPBES) and a national-level (the Hungarian ecosystem services assessment) SPI as case studies to investigate the non-visible factors – the informal norms and social conventions – that determine how participants collaborate and act in certain situations, and to understand the roots as well as the consequences of differences across these invisible factors. Qualitative data are gained from semi-structured interviews with researchers and policy actors participating in SPI processes, systematic observations made at meetings of SPIs, and the author’s personal reflections on her role and actions taken at these SPIs.

I argue that it is not only the formal and informal institutional set-up of the SPI that limits the active participation of EE researchers in science-policy interactions, but the internal norms and behaviour scientists bring to these spheres through the processes of socialization. Our hierarchical education and academic system and the relative detachment of researchers from the general public do not favour inter- and trans- disciplinary collaboration but rather specialization and uncertainty avoidance. Changes in the short-term might be expected as a result of increased international collaboration, while in the longer term institutional transformations – both within SPIs and in the broader socio-cultural context – seem necessary to create a more enabling environment.