

Call for papers for Current Sociology Monograph (Special Issue)

Research to Practice?

Expectations, Tensions, and Compromises in Science-Practice Knowledge Relations

Guest editors: Walter Bartl, Robert Aust, Melike Janßen

Scientific knowledge is widely seen as a crucial contribution to human progress, economic growth, and social welfare. More recently, the expectation to produce usable scientific knowledge has become explicitly institutionalized in research funding and legal frameworks of universities and other research institutions. The call for the production of useful scientific knowledge by funding programs is predicated on referring to grand or global challenges that require addressing (Isakova et al., 2024; Kaldewey, 2018). Furthermore, research that promises to have an “impact” on social problems is favored (Derrick, 2019; Gengnagel et al., 2022; Kim & Yoo, 2019). Concurrently, this optimism in science policy is confronted by scientific evidence indicating a considerable gap between research and practice and suggesting fundamental differences in institutional logics between science and other social spheres (Lattu & Cai, 2023). In fact, extending beyond a merely instrumentalist perspective, the research-practice relationship has been conceptualized in various ways (Boswell & Smith, 2017; Wittrock, 1991), and the debate remains open as to which of these conceptualizations is the most compelling.

Approaches on how this gap could be narrowed are manyfold. Research policy tries to narrow this gap by measuring, monitoring, and valorizing research impact (Dotti & Walczyk, 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2024). Scholars have proposed various research styles aiming for the production of “socially robust” knowledge (Nowotny, 2003). These include transformative and transdisciplinary social research, which has led to the development of innovative methods, such as living labs (Hossain et al., 2019) and other interactive knowledge co-production formats. Technology transfer scholars have advocated for the translation of scientific evidence into not only patents but also (industry) standards (Blind, 2024). Higher education programs bridge the theory-practice gap in a more implicit way—primarily by fostering the development of professional competence and enabling graduate mobility (Stock et al., 2024b). Research organizations and universities have strived to bridge the research-practice gap by implementing new structures, such as technology transfer offices (Falani Bezerra & Torkomian, 2024). Stakeholder organizations, although not formally part of the science system, recruit academically trained staff and tailor their activities to enhance their absorptive capacities for academic research and translate it for their target groups.

Based on historical research and theories of professions, it is posited that a particularly crucial role could be assigned to scientists themselves to step the research-practice gap. The closest to an instrumentalist perspective is arguably Talcott Parsons’ modernist assumption that the expansion of higher education would contribute to the professionalization of work and the rationalization of society based on scientific knowledge (Stock et al., 2024a). In comparison, Andrew Abbott (1988) highlights the competitive dynamic between different disciplines and professions, thereby introducing more contingency into the subject. Furthermore, significant variations exist among academic disciplines concerning the relationship between academic research and professional practice (Gläser et al., 2022). It is noteworthy that several disciplines do not even dispose of clearly delineated fields of professional practice. Beyond the classic professions, the close connection between research and practice was not always seen by academia and societal stakeholders as being pivotal to disciplinary research. Instead, the concept of purpose-free knowledge creation played a

crucial role in establishing the (relative) autonomy of science (Stichweh, 1992). Subsequently, the distinction between basic and applied science was neither seen as endangering academic freedom nor as a categorical preference for one over the other (Bush, 1945/1960; Merton, 1942/1973). It is evident that there have been heterogeneous trajectories and institutions of academic freedom in world society (Lerch et al., 2024). While applied research can provide valuable inspiration for basic research, tensions between societal spheres and between the different missions of research institutions exist as well (Götze & Schneiderberg, 2025). The question, therefore, remains of how academic freedom can be reconciled with the expectations of societal stakeholders (Schimank, 2024).

This special issue builds on the described policy shifts and recent scientific developments reconfiguring the roles of research and practice by placing a strong emphasis on the dialectics of knowledge production and translation. The present call invites papers investigating not only how academic knowledge is translated to shape practical fields but also how practical fields shape, constrain, and inform the production of academic knowledge itself. This orientation allows us to go beyond instrumentalist notions of research-practice relations, such as “knowledge transfer,” and to interrogate the recursive processes, tensions, and negotiations that mark the boundary between research and practice. Therefore, we welcome contributions exploring the mutual constitution of epistemic and practical fields, foregrounding the ways in which research enters policy, administration, companies, and activism while also being reshaped by these engagements.

This special issue seeks to explore the historical constitution of societal expectations about research-practice knowledge relations, as well as the challenges and opportunities that may arise from attempts to narrow the gap between the two. In accordance with Current Sociology’s commitment to contemporary relevance, the issue also examines how historical developments shape present-day modes of engagement and what future configurations of research-practice relations may emerge. It aims to bring together diverse perspectives that advance our understanding of how academic research operates in conditions of goal ambiguity and normative conflict.

The planned special issue will focus on crucial dimensions of research-practice knowledge relations, such as:

- Concepts of “knowledge transfer” (knowledge use, knowledge exchange, knowledge translation, knowledge diffusion, knowledge mobilization, innovation, organizational learning, expertise, transdisciplinary research, transformative research) and their practical implications.
- Structures and processes in endeavors of academic knowledge transfer
- Knowledge demands on research from multiple stakeholders
- approaches to navigate different institutional logics between science and other social spheres

Both conceptual and empirical papers are welcome.

Timeline

- **Deadline for the submission of abstracts and expressions of interest: 15 December 2025**
- Invitation to submit full papers: January 2025
- Deadline for the submission of full manuscripts: 15 April 2026
- Peer review: 30 June 2026
- Revisions: 30 September 2026
- Selection and approval: 30 November 2026

Abstracts should not be longer than one page and submitted to the guest editors:

walter.bartl@hof.uni-halle.de; r.aust@macromedia.de; janssen@dzhw.eu

References

- Abbott, A. (1988). *The System of Professions*. University of Chicago Press.
- Blind, K. (2024). Standardization in the context of transdisciplinarity. *Sustainability Science*, 19(5), 1609–1621. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-024-01524-3>
- Boswell, C., & Smith, K. (2017). Rethinking policy ‘impact’: Four models of research-policy relations. *Palgrave Communications*, 3(44), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-017-0042-z>
- Bush, V. (1960). *Science, the endless frontier: A report to the President on a program for postwar scientific research*. National Science Foundation. (Original work published 1945)
- Derrick, G. (2019). Cultural impact of the impact agenda: implications for social sciences and humanities (SSH) research. In D. Bueno, J. Casanovas, M. Garcés, & J. M. Vilalta (Eds.), *Humanities and Higher Education: Synergies between Science, Technology and Humanities* (pp. 385–392). Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI).
- Dotti, N. F., & Walczyk, J. (2022). What is the societal impact of university research? A policy-oriented review to map approaches, identify monitoring methods and success factors. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 102157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2022.102157>
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Jeyaraj, A., Hughes, L., Davies, G. H., Ahuja, M., Albashrawi, M. A., Al-Busaidi, A. S., Al-Sharhan, S., Al-Sulaiti, K. I., Altinay, L., Amalaya, S., Archak, S., Ballestar, M. T., Bhagwat, S. A., Bharadwaj, A., Bhushan, A., Bose, I., Budhwar, P., Bunker, D., . . . Walton, P. (2024). “Real impact”: Challenges and opportunities in bridging the gap between research and practice – Making a difference in industry, policy, and society. *International Journal of Information Management*, 78, 102750. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2023.102750>
- Falani Bezerra, S. Y. A. de, & Torkomian, A. L. V. (2024). Technology transfer offices: A systematic review of the literature and future perspective. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 15(1), 4455–4488. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01319-4>
- Gengnagel, V., Zimmermann, K., & Büttner, S. M. (2022). ‘Closer to the Market’: EU Research Governance and Symbolic Power. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 60(6), 1573–1591. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13326>
- Gläser, J., Ash, M., Buenstorf, G., Hopf, D., Hubenschmid, L., Janßen, M., Laudel, G., Schimank, U., Stoll, M., Wilholt, T., Zechlin, L., & Lieb, K. (2022). The Independence of Research—A Review of Disciplinary Perspectives and Outline of Interdisciplinary Prospects. *Minerva*, 60(1), 105–138. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-021-09451-8>
- Götze, N., & Schneiderberg, C. (2025). Wissens- und Technologietransfer. In P. Pasternack, G. Reinmann, & C. Schneiderberg (Eds.), *Hochschulforschung* (pp. 521–531). Nomos.
- Hossain, M., Leminen, S., & Westerlund, M. (2019). A systematic review of living lab literature. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 213, 976–988.
- Isakova, A., Neuwinger, M., Schulze Waltrup, R., & Uraiqat, O. (2024). Global challenges in world politics and their modes of construction. In A. Isakova, M. Neuwinger, R. Schulze Waltrup, & O. Uraiqat (Eds.), *Constructing Global Challenges in World Politics* (pp. 3–20). Routledge.
- Kaldewey, D. (2018). The grand challenges discourse: Transforming identity work in science and science policy. *Minerva*, 56(2), 161–182. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-017-9332-2>
- Kim, J., & Yoo, J. (2019). Science and Technology Policy Research in the EU: From Framework Programme to HORIZON 2020. *Social Sciences*, 8(5), 153. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8050153>

- Lattu, A., & Cai, Y. (2023). Institutional logics in the open science practices of university–industry research collaboration. *Science & Public Policy*, 50(5), 905–916. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scad037>
- Lerch, J. C., Frank, D. J., & Schofer, E. (2024). The Social Foundations of Academic Freedom: Heterogeneous Institutions in World Society, 1960 to 2022. *American Sociological Review*, 89(1), 88–125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224231214000>
- Merton, R. K. (1973). The Normative Structure of Science. In N. W. Storer (Ed.), *The sociology of science: Theoretical and empirical investigations* (267–78). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1942)
- Nowotny, H. (2003). Democratising expertise and socially robust knowledge. *Science and Public Policy*, 30(3), 151–156.
- Schimank, U. (2024). Wissenschaftliche Objektivität und gesellschaftliche Interessen – die konstitutive Grundspannung ko-produzierten Transfers. In H. Backhaus-Maul (Ed.), *Forschungsbasierter Wissenstransfer und gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt: Theorie, Empirie, Konzepte und Instrumente* (439–466). Campus.
- Stichweh, R. (1992). The sociology of scientific disciplines: On the genesis and stability of the disciplinary structure of modern science. *Science in Context*, 5(1), 3–15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269889700001071>
- Stock, M., Mitterle, A., & Baker, D. P. (2024a). Academization: A New Perspective on Occupations. In M. Stock, A. Mitterle, & D. P. Baker (Eds.), *How Universities Transform Occupations and Work in the 21st Century: The Academization of German and American Economies* (pp. 1–24). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-367920230000047001>
- Stock, M., Mitterle, A., & Baker, D. P. (Eds.). (2024b). *How Universities Transform Occupations and Work in the 21st Century: The Academization of German and American Economies*. Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3679202347>
- Wittrock, B. (1991). Social knowledge and public policy: Eight models of interaction. In P. Wagner (Ed.), *Social sciences and modern states: National experiences and theoretical crossroads* (pp. 333–354). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511983993.015>