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# From measuring impacts to mapping impact systems

Lessons for the impact assessment of research infrastructures from a study on the European Social Survey ERIC

*Impact of R&I Policy at the Crossroads of Policy Design, Implementation and Evaluation*

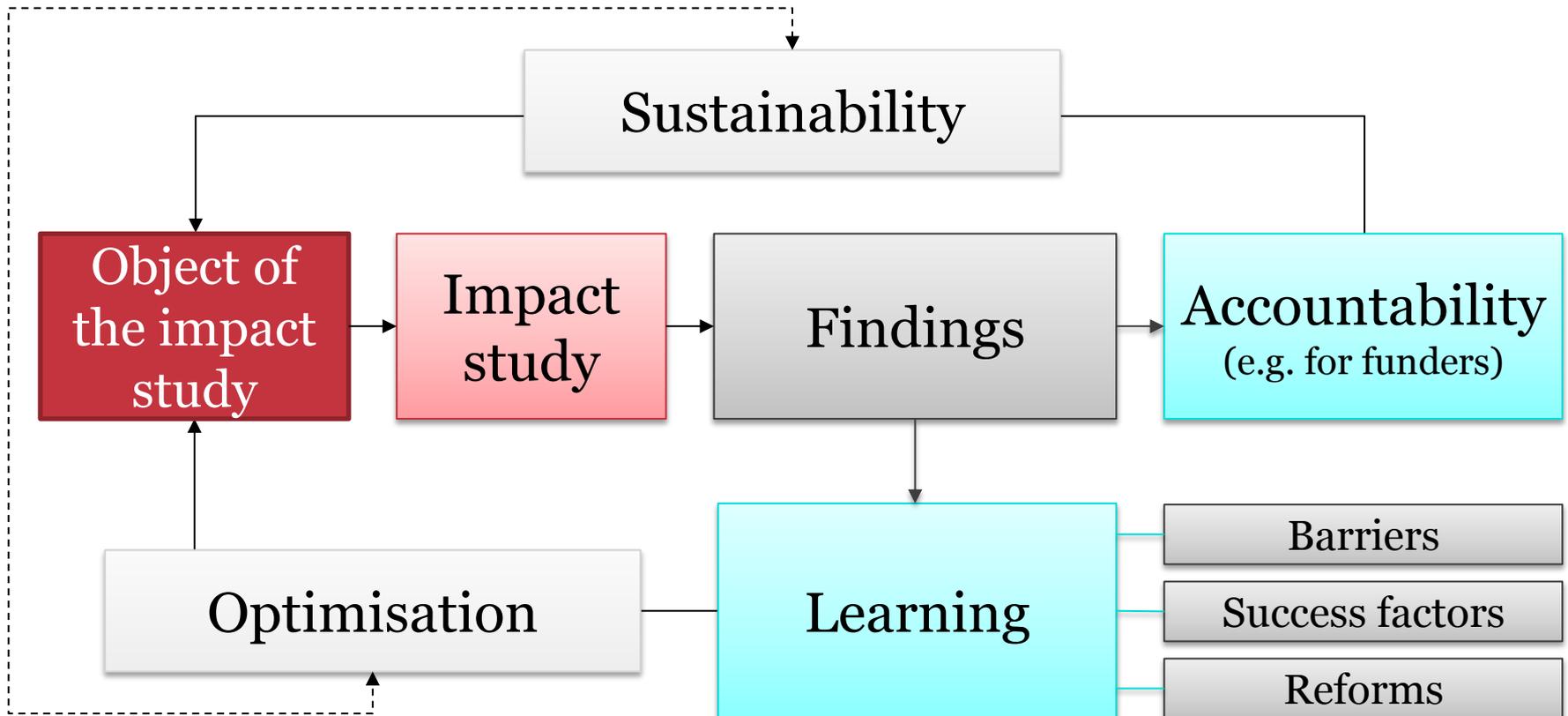
*Peter Kolarz*

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## Impact assessment and research infrastructures

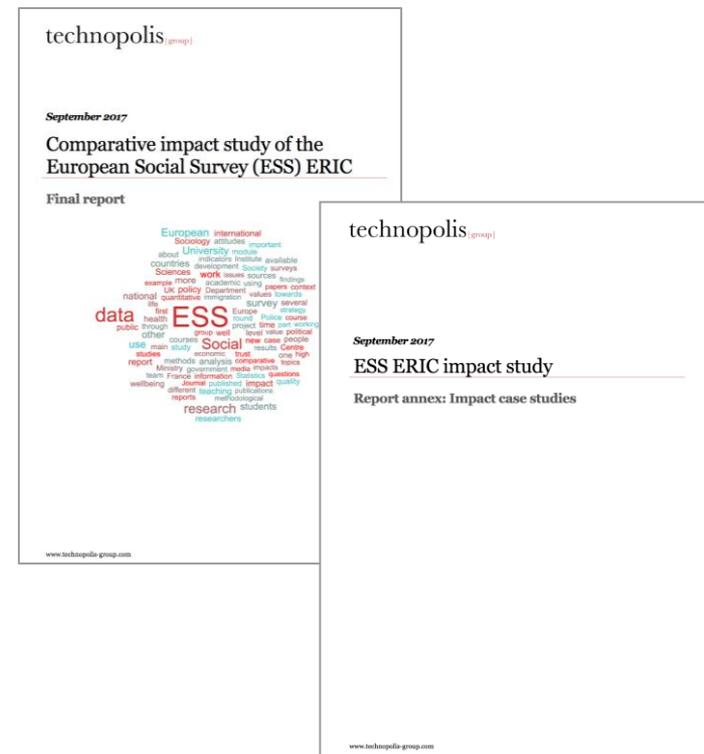
- (Ex-post & interim) IA is increasingly common since around 2000
- Can consider academic and/or non-academic impact (or teaching impact!)
- Possible objects of study can be: programmes, fields (e.g. at national level), research groups, departments, institutions, individual researchers...
- And research infrastructures:
  - *Growing interest in the impact assessment of RIs, especially by OECD GSF, ESFRI*
  - *Current consensus: there are no standardised approaches to assessing impact of RIs, but more common standards are needed*

## The purpose of impact assessment – a brief guide



## The ESS ERIC Impact study

- Conducted as part of the H2020 Project ESS-SUSTAIN
- June 2016 – October 2017
- Conducted by Technopolis & CWTS Leiden (bibliometrics)
- Main report and annex booklet featuring 36 impact case studies:
- <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/findings/impact>



## The European Social Survey

- The ESS is an international, comparative survey of social and political values and attitudes
- Deployed every 2 years across Europe to create comparable, robust data based on face-to-face questionnaire interviews
- 28 countries due to participate in its 9<sup>th</sup> round of data collection
- Launched in 2002, became an ERIC in 2013, now in round 9
- 120,000+ registered ESS users (+ a 'dark figure' of further students)
- 64% students, 27% academics (research/ faculty/ PhD), 9% other domains (e.g. policy, NGOs, businesses, private individuals)
- User numbers are growing, but there are many long-term users

## Purpose and aims of the ESS impact study

Academic, non-academic and teaching impact of the ESS

Stock take /  
overview

Showcasing

Best  
practice

Recommen-  
dations

Past / present

Future

Additionally: assessing  
the impact of research  
infrastructures

## Method components

- Desk research/ document review
- Analysis of ESS user data (supplied by NSD in Bergen)
- Observation/ attendance of ESS-related events (e.g. the 3<sup>rd</sup> ESS conference, Lausanne, July 2016)
- 50 interviews with internal stakeholders
- Online survey (n=2238) of active ESS users
- A short online survey of student users
- 50 interviews with external stakeholders
- Analysis of publication information captured by the ESS in the 'ESS Bibliography'
- Bibliometric analysis of ESS-based publications (CWTS)
- 36 case studies of academic, non-academic or teaching impact.

## Method logic

Study progression		Object of study	Key questions	Method focus: Quant./qual.
Development of understanding	General	'Use'	Who uses the ESS? Where? When?	Mostly quantitative
		'Benefits'	Why? What advantages / opportunities does the ESS bring?	Mostly qualitative
		'Outputs'	What was 'produced' through use of the ESS?	Mostly quantitative
	Specific	'Impacts'	What Outcomes / Effects / Impacts did ESS-use lead to?	Mostly qualitative

## **Headline findings in brief**

## Advantages and benefits of the ESS: headline points

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- Covers areas (values & attitudes) not covered by many other surveys (e.g. labour force surveys, EU-silc, etc.)
- Outstanding quality
  - *Clear preference over alternatives (ISSP, EVS, Eurobarometer, etc.)*
    - Sampling
    - Comparability
    - Contextual information
    - Theoretical information
- Breadth, continuity & evolution
  - *Core vs rotating modules*

## Some further benefits

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- Versatile
  - *Can be stand-alone data use or combined w/ other data collection*
- As a teaching resource
  - *Free, easy to access, broad range of topics;*
  - *In smaller countries: often a lack of high-quality alternative datasets*
- ECRs and periphery
  - *Accessible data source to start publishing/ building a career*
- Longevity enables analysis over time
  - *Generational shifts or effects of certain events on attitudes*

## Benefits noted in user survey: % 'To a large extent'

### For users themselves

- Enabled you to access and use relevant evidence more easily (43%)
- Enabled you to pursue new research questions, ideas and/or projects (40%)
- Enabled you to make greater use of data in your work (38%)

### For wider fields

- Improved the monitoring or understanding of the social structure, conditions and attitudes across Europe (38%)
- Contributed to improved social science (34%)
- Contributed to improved standards for cross national surveys (32%)

Allows questions to be addressed that otherwise could not.

## Output highlights

Journal articles  
(up to 2017):

**>1,700**

Books, chapters,  
edited volumes  
(up to 2017):

**>700**

Journal articles  
listed on WoS  
(up to 2016):

**>900**

+ Many academic  
conference papers

+ Numerous  
policy reports &  
briefings

+ Over 30% of  
active users have  
produced teaching  
materials

+ Many examples  
of ESS-based work  
in news media

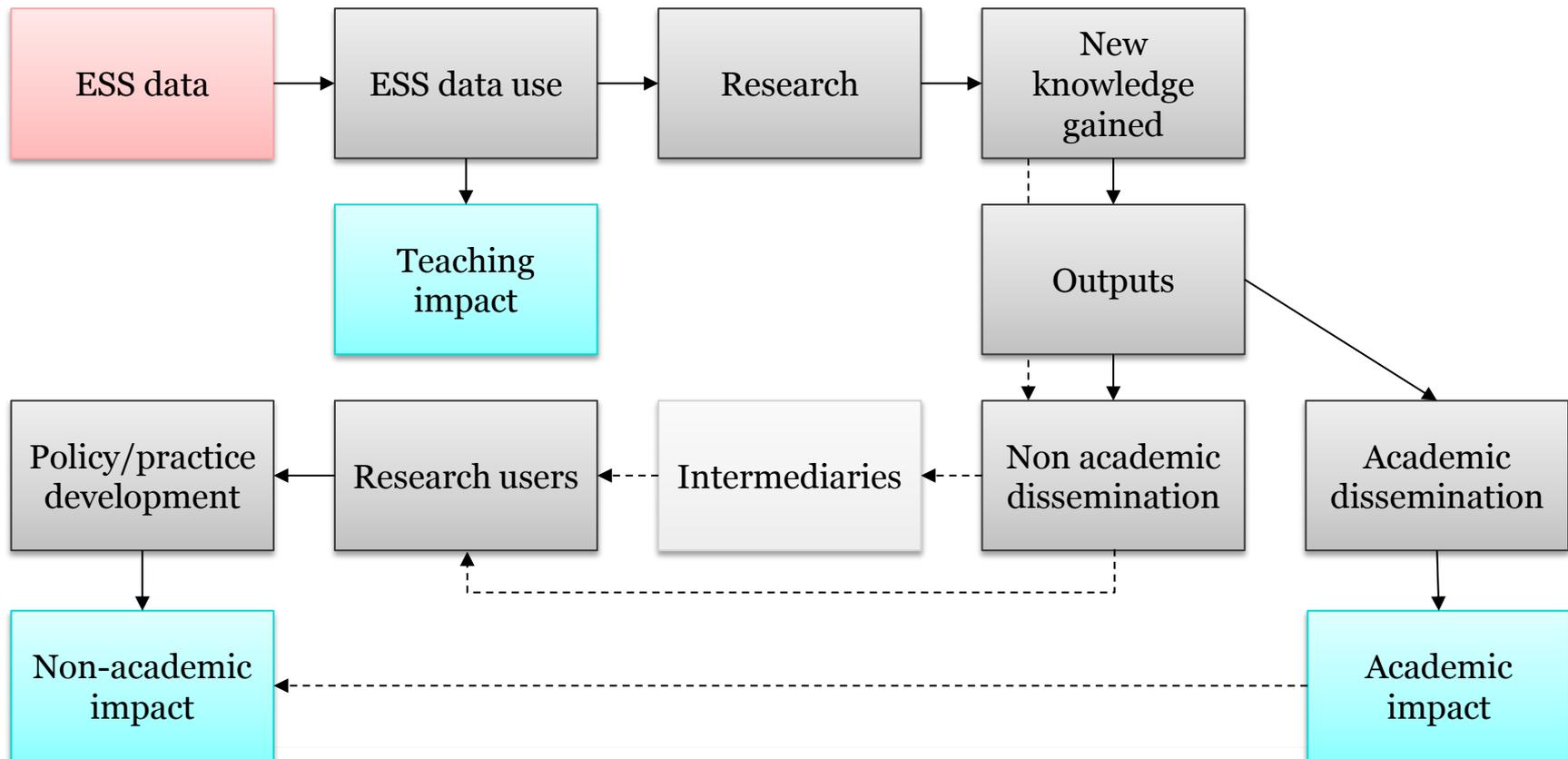
## Impact highlights – the VERY short version

- 22% of ESS-based WoS publications fall into the top-10% most cited articles within their respective microfield
  - *This remains constant when we control for institutional strengths*
- Many 10s of institutional ‘hotspots’ for research and teaching
  - *E.g. universities of Ghent, Leuven, Radboud Nijmegen, Tartu, LSE, NTNU, Cologne and Zurich are all examples of such clustering*
- Over 100 examples of non-academic impact in fields including:
  - *Immigration, quality of life/wellbeing, law enforcement/justice, health inequalities, LGBT rights, children and family policy, active ageing*
- Impact types include: supporting policy creation or policy change, political agenda-setting, influence on political and public debate more broadly, use in gov’t monitoring, improved survey standards

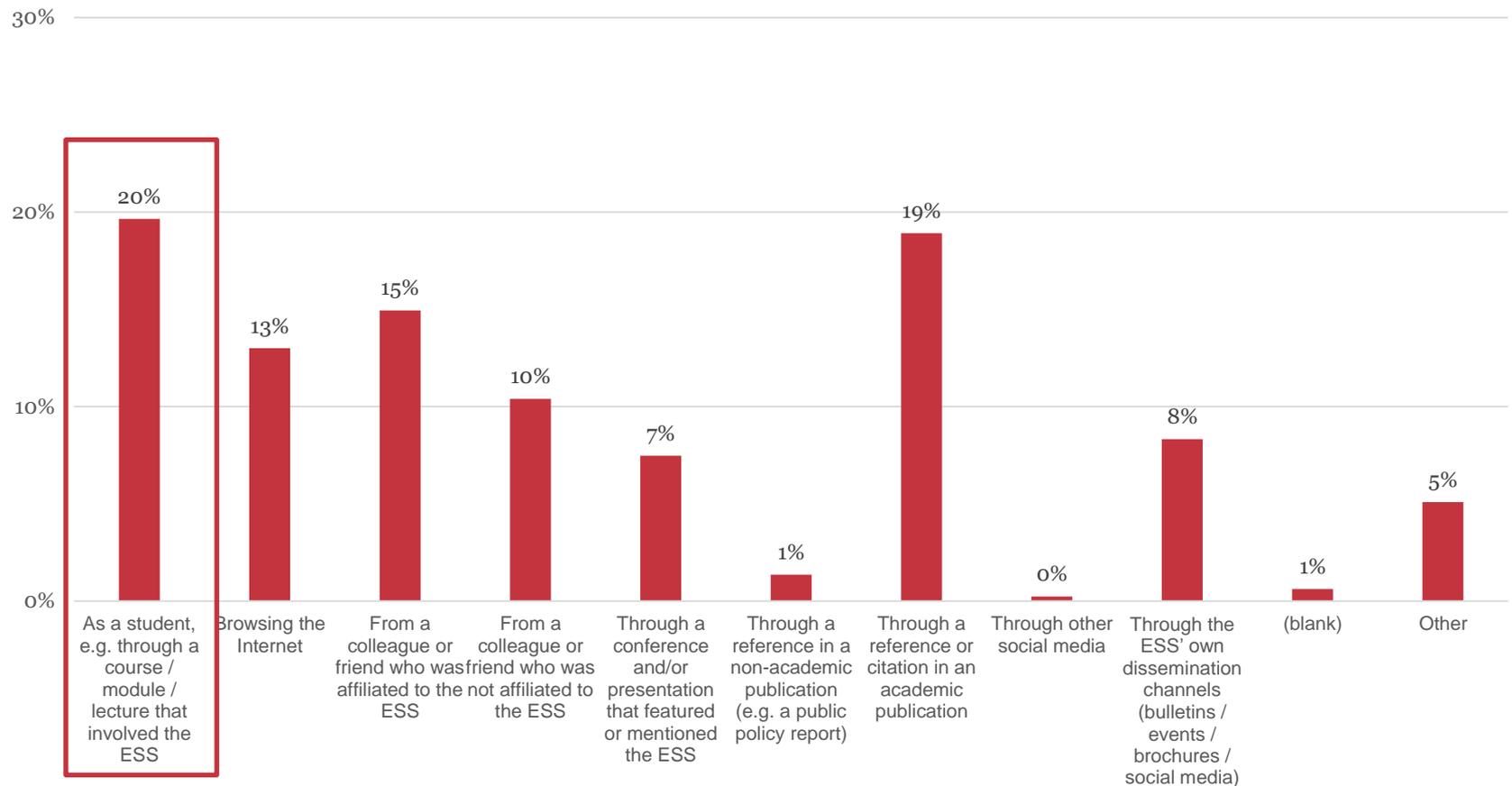
# **Contextualising impact: Impact systems**

## How do impacts happen?

The linear model:



## How does the ESS (and its impact) grow?



Survey of active users: “How did you first become aware of the ESS?”

## Further findings about non-academic impact & pathways

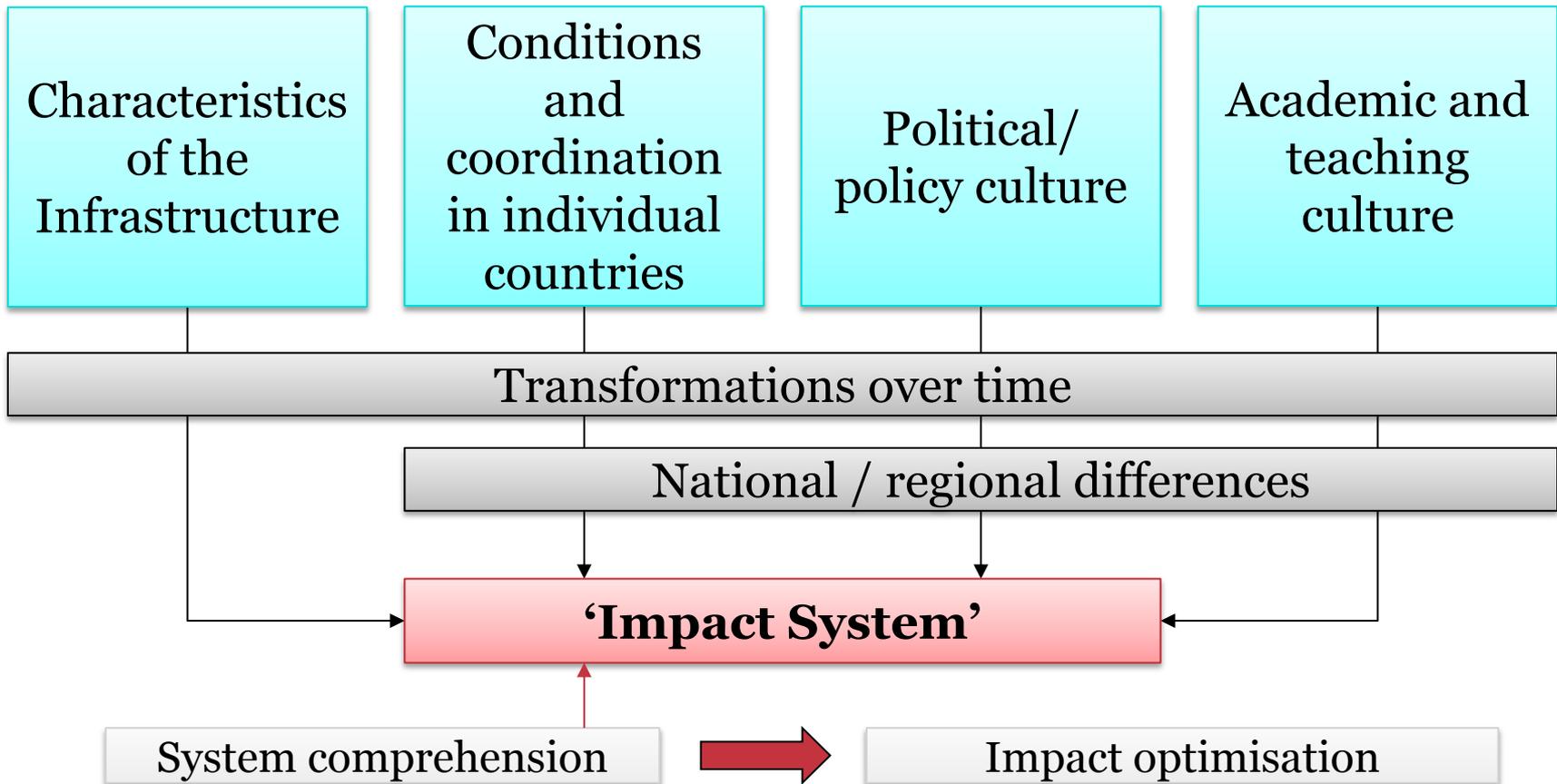
- Researchers generally find ESS user-friendly; non-researchers often require simplification/ translation
- NC teams have a critical role in dissemination / ‘translation’
- So do funders (cf. Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs)
- Impacts don’t always occur via ESS-based publications
- People-transfer & personal contacts are also critical pathways
- Some countries have established social science traditions (& existing surveys!), other less so
- Some countries have important ‘intermediary’ organisations (think tanks, etc), others do not
- KT cultures between academia and policy matter
- Wider societal impact takes a long time (& hidden paths!) to materialise

## Current perceived barriers to greater impact

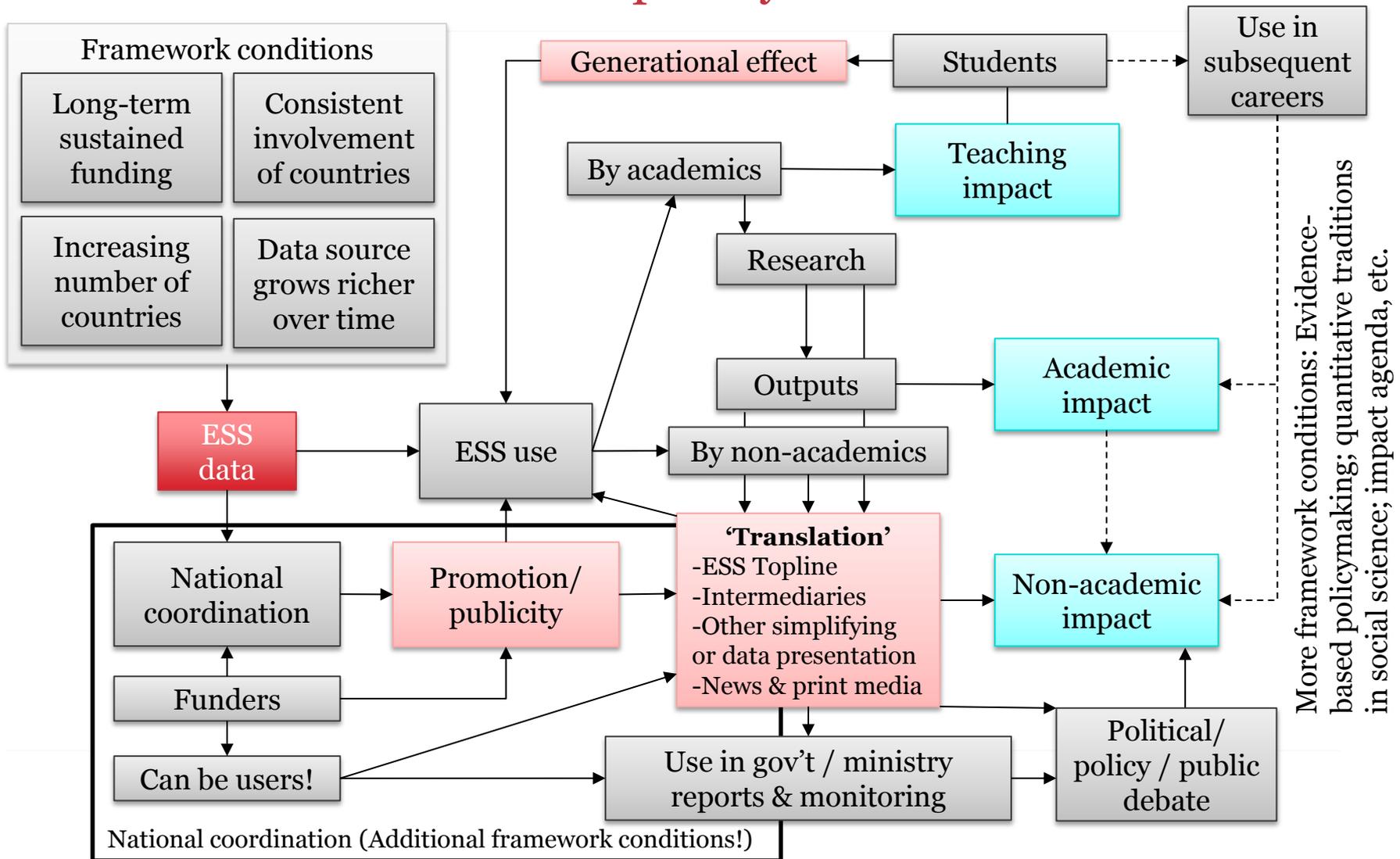
Top 5 answers:

Barrier	n	Minor barrier	Major barrier
<b>Selection of topics</b> (i.e. important topics missing)	1276	14.0%	44.3%
<b>Consistency over time</b> of surveyed countries	1268	14.9%	39.2%
Selection of <b>surveyed countries</b>	1275	10.2%	35.6%
<b>Lack of knowledge</b> about the ESS among non-users	1263	8.1%	22.1%
Ease/ <b>difficulty</b> in accessing/ downloading ESS data	1280	<3%	15.6%

## Multiple sets of framework conditions



## Outline of the ESS ERIC impact system

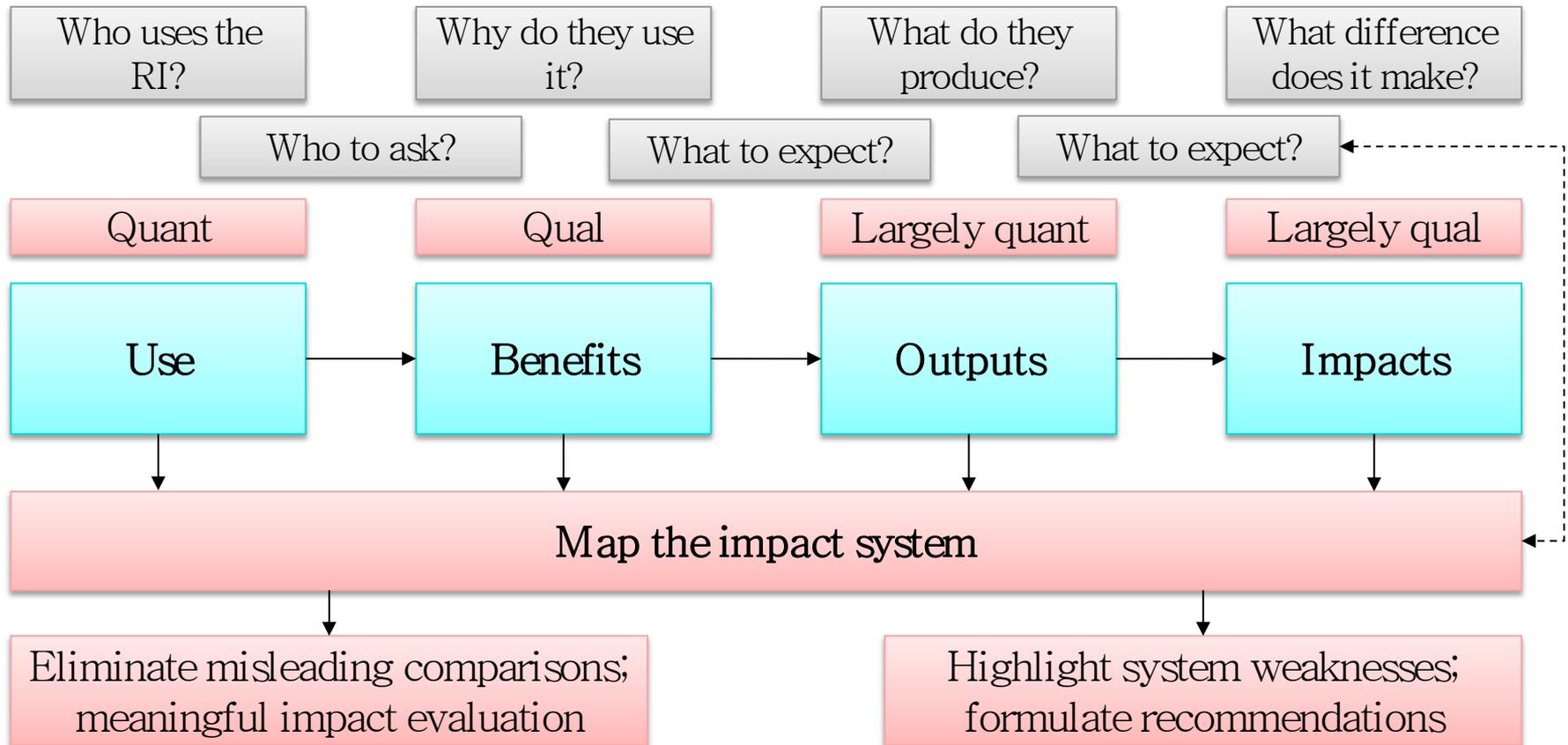


**Final thoughts:  
Implications of impact systems**

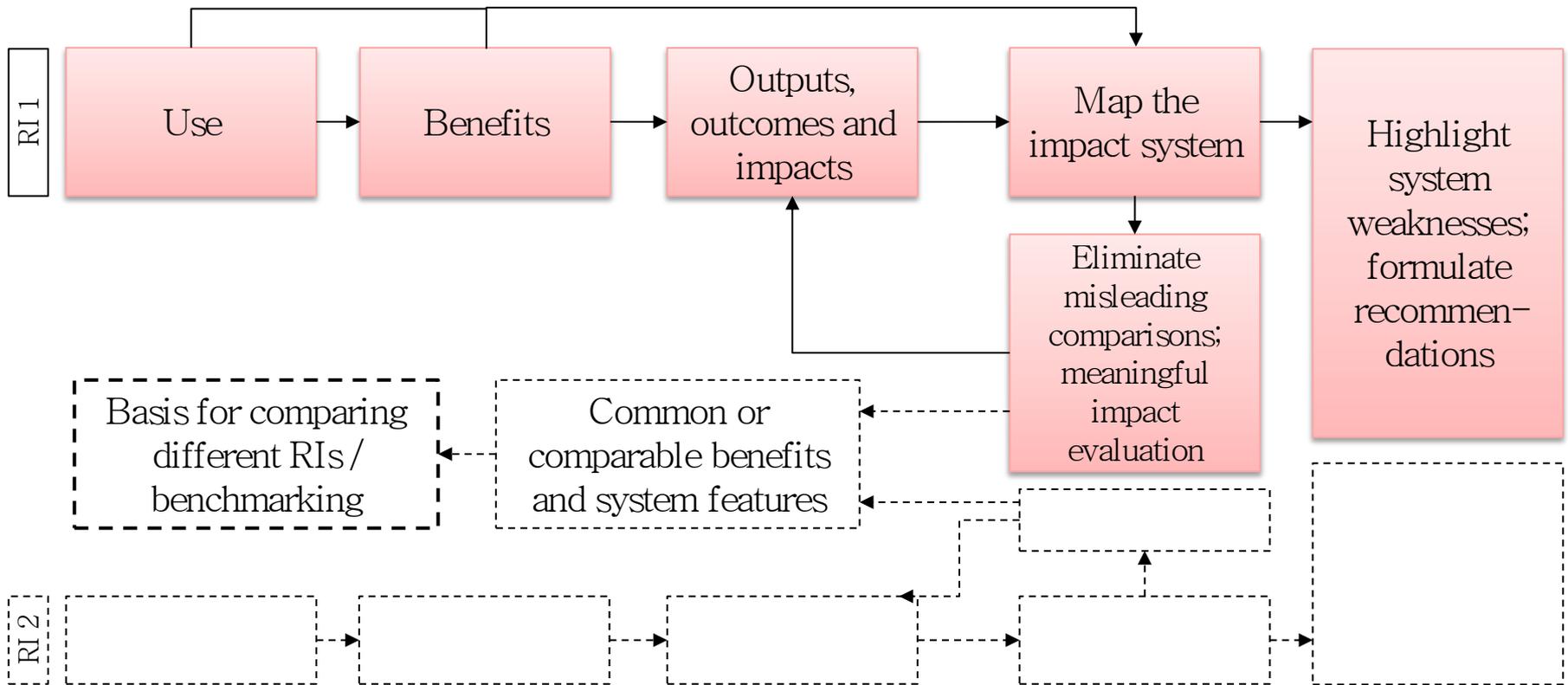
## The notion of RI impact systems...

1. ...challenges the idea of common indicators and assessment tools for RI impact assessment, but does posit a possible common assessment approach
2. ...emphasises the importance of mixed methods

## Mixed, not 'side-by-side' methods



## Mapping systems for meaningful assessment



- <http://www.technopolis-group.com/>
- <http://www.technopolis-group.com/sti/research-infrastructures/>
- <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/findings/impact>

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