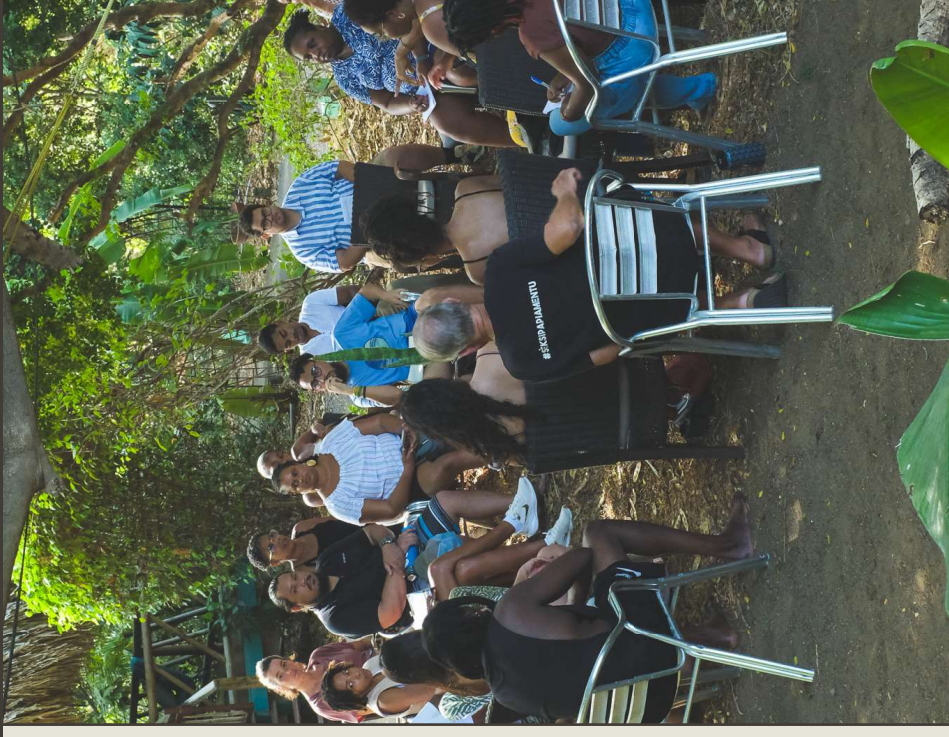


Aligning research uptake with context: a typology

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VLIRUOS Learning Event 1 | Getting Started: Integrating UUI in the Project Cycle

Session Outline

- Key concepts
- Context-appropriate uptake decisions
- Building the typology
- Using the typology
- Cases from the Caribbean
- Dilemmas, tensions, and lessons



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Aligning research uptake with context: Supporting researchers' decisions towards context-appropriate research uptake strategies

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ABSTRACT

Academic and non-academic societal actors alike are seeking to optimize the ways in which scientific research may contribute to sustainable development, for which a diverse range of research uptake strategies have been developed. Yet, while the literature emphasizes that the appropriateness of research uptake strategies depends on the context in which they are applied, designing appropriate research uptake strategies to fit a specific context remains a challenging decision-making task for many researchers. In this paper, we conceptualize appropriate research uptake strategies to be those that align with the research and societal sustainability contexts in which they are applied and account for the interactions that emerge between these two contexts. With the aim of supporting researchers in designing more appropriate research uptake strategies in a wide range of contexts, we then build on this conceptualization to propose an appropriateness-typology distinguishing between four broad research uptake approaches: the knowledge transfer approach; the commissioned research approach; the direct engagement approach; and the co-production approach. The typology matches each approach to the dynamic research and societal sustainability contexts in which it is most likely to be appropriate, while seeking to accommodate nuanced understandings of how researchers may approach uptake given different contexts and at the same time aiming at parsimony. By explicitly conceptualizing the role of context in research uptake decision-making and taking a first step towards an appropriateness-typology of research uptake, we hope to empower researchers to design more context-appropriate research uptake strategies such as to better contribute to sustainable development.

What is Research Uptake?

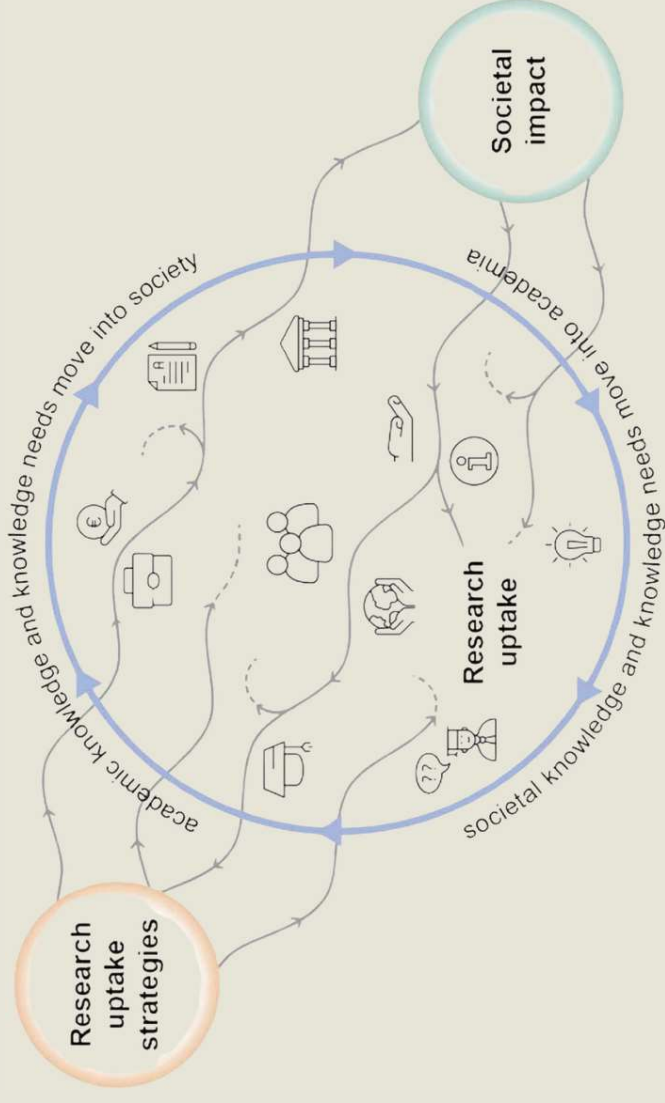
Research uptake is an **intricate, dynamic, context-dependent**, and often **non-linear** process, whereby non-academic societal actors “take up” – i.e., consider, use, and/or apply – scientific knowledge.

What is the Societal Impact of Research?

Societal impacts are the economic, environmental, social, epistemic, or cultural **influences of scientific research on society** that go **beyond academia.**

The Research Uptake Process

Research uptake often precedes
– but may or may not result in –
societal impacts.



Context and Appropriateness

Appropriateness is the **match between** a research uptake **strategy and** the research- and societal sustainability decision-making **contexts** in which it is implemented.

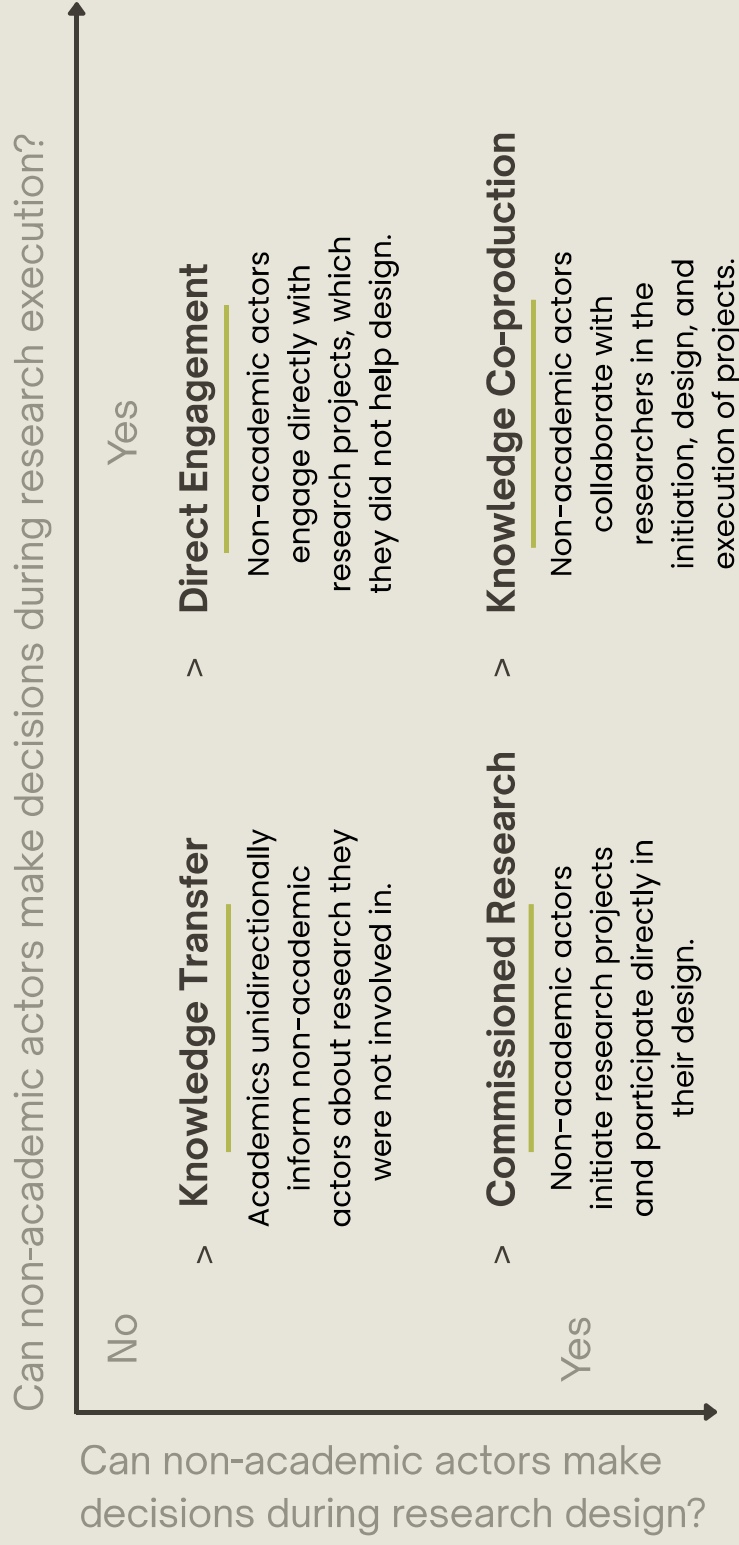
Context are those **characteristics of actors and situations that** are likely to **influence the research uptake process**, and thereby shape the appropriateness of research uptake decisions.

Context-Appropriate Research Uptake Decisions

Research uptake decisions can be deemed appropriate when they are **perceived to align with both the research decision-making context and the societal sustainability decision-making context**, as well as the **dynamics between them**.

Research Uptake Approaches

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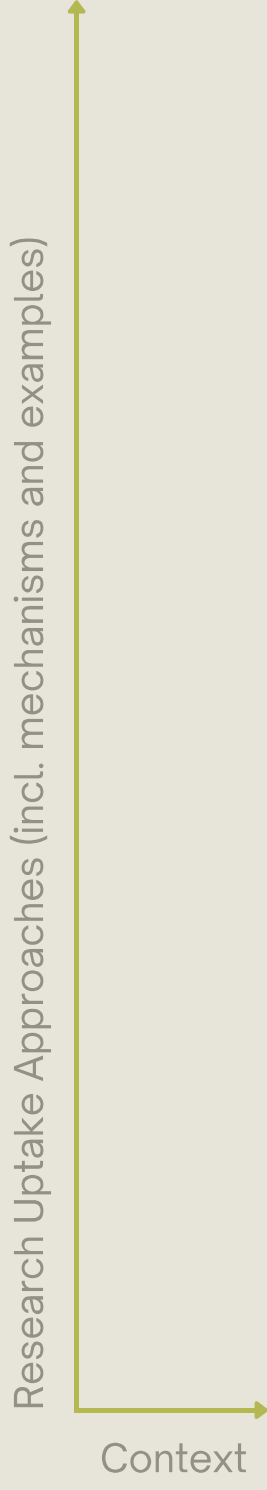
Contextual Dimensions

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- the **role** that **researchers** are willing and able to play
- the **role** that **societal actors** are willing and able to play
- the **orientation** of **research projects** towards societal impact
- the **orientation** of the **sustainability problem** towards research
- the **dynamic interactions** between these factors

Building the typology

The typology **matches approaches and contexts** by bringing them together into **four ideal type** descriptions of research uptake approaches, which are accompanied by a discussion of the contexts in which they are most likely to be considered appropriate.



Research Uptake Approach	Knowledge Transfer Approach	Commissioned Research Approach	Direct Engagement Approach	Co-Production Approach
Mechanism fostering uptake How may the strategic actions of researchers facilitate the uptake of their findings by non-academic societal actors? Examples of strategic activities • Open access publishing • Producing specialized outputs (e.g., policy briefs) • Science festivals, cafés, etc. Non-exhaustive list of strategic research uptake activities that can be associated with each approach	By facilitating access to research findings that non-academic societal actors may have otherwise been unaware of. • Academic consultancy • Evaluation research • Science shops	By addressing research problems that are framed with the input of non-academic societal actors and facilitating access to research findings. • Participatory research • Community-engaged research • Citizen science	By executing research in a manner informed by and informing non-academic societal actors and facilitating access to research findings. • Transdisciplinary research • Participatory action research • Co-creation of boundary objects • Citizen science	By addressing research problems that are framed with the input of, executing research in a manner informed by and informing, and facilitating access to findings to non-academic societal actors. • Transdisciplinary research • Participatory action research • Co-creation of boundary objects • Citizen science
Contextual dimensions: characteristics of actors and situations that influence the research uptake process Researcher's role: what roles am I willing and able to conduct in the research and uptake processes? Non-academic societal actor's role: what roles are non-academic societal actors willing and able to conduct in the research and uptake processes? Orientation of research project towards societal impact: what kind of research project is this and how does it relate to societal impact? Orientation of sustainability problem towards research: what kind of sustainability problem is this and how does it relate to research and its uptake? Interactions between contexts: which challenging or synergistic interactions exist or may emerge between the research and societal sustainability contexts?	Respond to research tenders; facilitate participation of non-academic societal actors in research design; translate and disseminate research findings. Commission (and often fund) the research project, participate actively in the problem definition, and take up research findings. Applied research aiming to address societal problems, guided by both scientific and societal values, but considering mainly scientific knowledge. Moderately structured problem, where academic and non-academic societal actors agree on what needs to be known for it to be addressed, but not on what needs to be done. The relationships between the research- and societal sustainability contexts may be considered synergistic when the project is initiated, but there is a low likelihood for any additional challenging interactions to emerge during project execution.	Design research projects; facilitate participation of non-academic societal actors in research execution; translate and disseminate research findings. Participate actively in and take up the findings of the research project, which has been designed without their involvement. Applied research aiming to address societal problems, guided mainly by scientific values, but considering both scientific and societal knowledge. Moderately structured problem, where academic and non-academic societal actors agree on what needs to be done for it to be addressed, but not on what needs to be known. The research- and societal sustainability contexts are considered synergistic when the project is initiated, but there is some likelihood for challenging interactions to emerge as the project is executed.	Facilitate participation of non-academic societal actors during research design and execution, as well as the translation and dissemination of findings. Participate actively in the initiation, problem definition, and execution of the research project, as well as in the translation of its findings. Combined research aiming to both satisfy scientific curiosity and address societal problems and incorporating both scientific and societal values and knowledge. Unstructured problem, with low agreement between academic and non-academic societal actors on what needs to be done and what needs to be known to address it. The relationships between the research- and societal sustainability contexts may be considered strenuous when the project is initiated, and there is a high likelihood for additional challenging interactions to emerge as the project is executed.	

Using the typology

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The typology aims to support **researchers, non-academic societal actors, and funders** in answering any of the following two questions:

1

Which approaches to research uptake best align with this research and societal decision-making context?

2

Which research and societal decision-making contexts best align with this research uptake approach?

Use 1: Which Approach?

What to do when:

- impact is of **primary vs secondary importance**, either for academic or societal actors?
- **resources** for impact are **abundant vs scarce**, either for academic or societal actors?
- **relationships** between academic and societal actors are either **conducive vs challenging**?

Use 2: Which Contexts?

When to:

- **transfer knowledge** unidirectionally to societal actors, or **ask questions** directly to academic actors?
- **commission research** from academic actors, or engage in **acquisition** activities with societal actors?
- conduct **participatory research**, or participate in research?
- **co-produce research**?



Example 1: SEALINK

SEALINK is an interdisciplinary research project which seeks to assess how land-derived and waterborne inputs affect the growth and survival of coral reefs on Curaçao.

It consists of 5 work packages, each of which have different orientations towards and resources to invest in impact.

Example 2: Greenpeace and VU

The Institute for Environmental Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam was commissioned by Greenpeace to research the consequences of climate change on the Caribbean island of Bonaire, which is a special municipality of the Netherlands.

This research formed the basis for a lawsuit whereby 8 Bonaireans and Greenpeace demanded that the Dutch State increased climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

The case was won in January, but the Dutch State is appealing the ruling.





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Example 3: Art-Science Retreat

While much sustainability research is done in the Caribbean, there is a general perception among island communities that relatively little of this research makes real positive impact on Caribbean societies.

The 3-day art-science retreat aimed to foster a space for early career Caribbean research professionals to critically reflect on and co-create a zine about the societal impact of sustainability research in the Caribbean.

Dilemma 1: Timing

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Research-uptake is dynamic and requires continuous decision-making.

EARLY DECISION- MAKING

Begin early on, even if the context is not entirely clear yet.

ITERATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Revise decisions as context becomes clearer or changes.

Dilemma 2: Misalignment

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Do not force things, undesirable impacts may cause real harm to society.

CHANGE CONTEXT

Can we resource academic or non-academic actors more adequately? Or, can we engage partners who are better suited to deliver impact?

CHANGE APPROACH

If there is more or less interest from societal actors than expected, is there scope to move towards more or less participatory approaches?

Dilemma 3: Changing Contexts

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Dynamic decision-making requires reflexivity and flexibility.

BE REFLEXIVE

Reflexive decision-making is crucial for adapting to changing contexts.

PLAN FLEXIBLY

To allow for such reflexivity, it is important to reserve adequate time, budget, and other resources for research uptake.

Lessons:

- There are **no silver bullets** when it comes to research uptake, research uptake is **dynamic** and contexts change constantly.
- Context-appropriate research uptake decisions require an understanding of context, **building relationships** is crucial for that.
- Impacts are not inherently beneficial, **inappropriate research uptake decisions may cause harm**.
- Both the societal impact of research and the context-appropriateness of research uptake decision are **subjective**, and **perspectives will differ**.



Thank you!

Are there any questions?