

Equity and Sustainability: converging policy communities

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of the research was to conduct an assessment of EU policymakers' perceptions through personal interviews to see how they understand sustainability, their own conceptualisation of global equity in access to resources (convergence) and planetary limits (contraction), their views on best practice examples in current policy, who they consider as main actors to facilitate change. The analysis summarized how policymakers regard a visionary concept of a common global frame with which to address our unsustainable practices, systems and behaviours. All insights are derived from our own action research, policy interviews with more than 15 policymakers and 3 policy experts.

METHODS

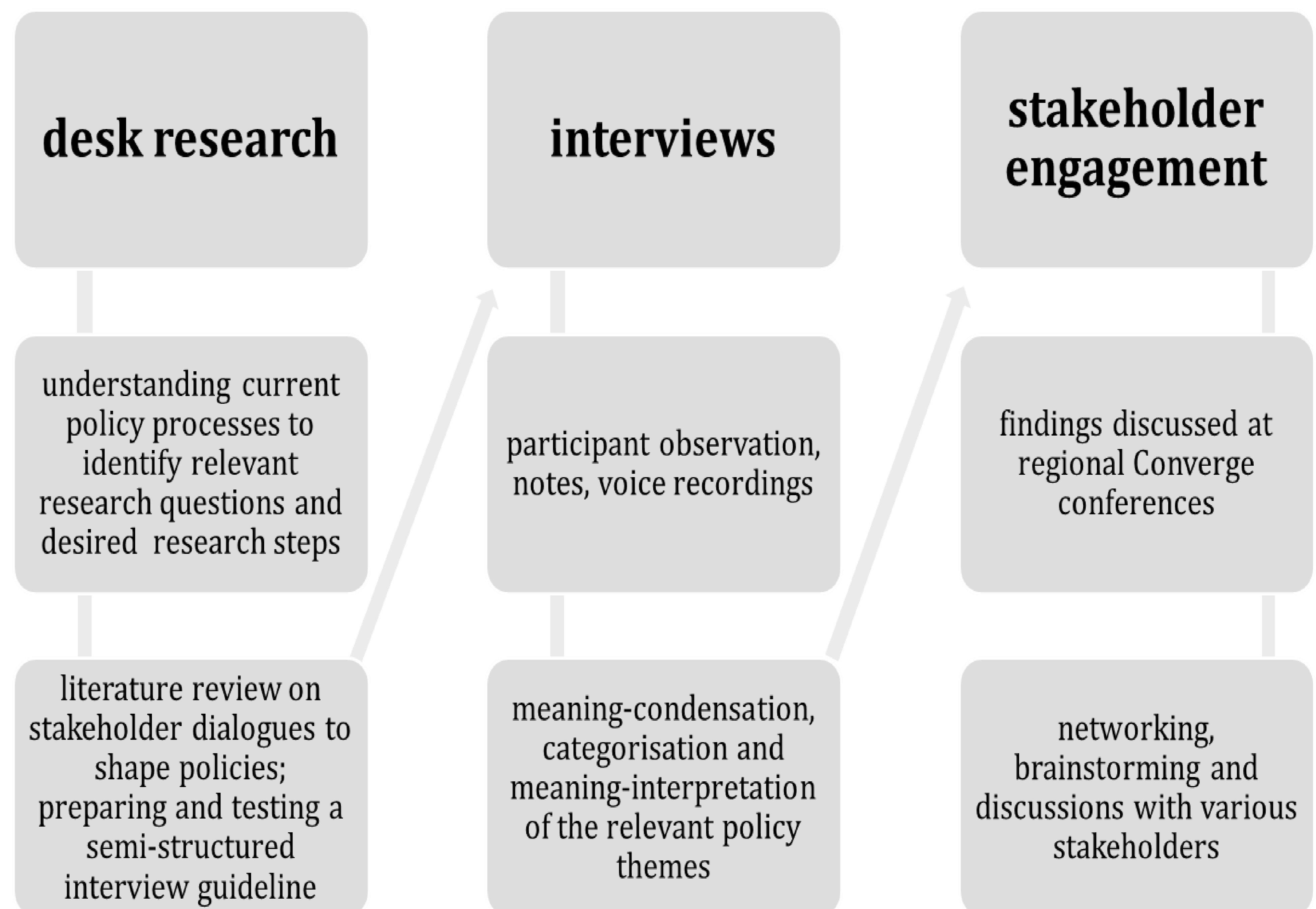
Our qualitative methodology went through the following empirical cycles (goal setting, action, reflection):

- **desk research:** understanding current policy processes to identify relevant research questions and desired action research steps; literature review on stakeholder dialogues to shape policies; preparing and testing a semi-structured interview guideline;
- **interviews in Brussels:** approach policymakers through personal invitations, phone contacts, consultations, semi structured personal interviews, notes, observations, voice recordings;
- **stakeholder engagement:** findings discussed at regional Converge conferences; networking, brainstorming and group discussions with various stakeholders, continuous participant observation.

As the main empirical move policy interviews have been started since April 2012 with the policy stakeholder groups to test the usefulness and applicability of the Convergence framework to policy development and communication. We have been completed two rounds of interviewing in Brussels in April-May and October 2012 with 15 policy officers at DG Environment, DG Development, DG Health and Consumers, DG Climate, DG Trade; and 3 independent experts working at MEP Greens/EFA Group, international research institutes and grassroot initiatives as policy advisors

Semi-structured interviews investigated the following 5 themes:

- **CONCEPTS:** SD in this unit, personal definition of sustainability, equity and limits, Convergence framework
- **MAIN CHALLENGES AND ACTORS:** organisations, documents or conceptual frameworks highlighting the message of limits/equity
- **POLICY INSTRUMENTS:** best practice examples, programs or projects; policy toolkit to facilitate engagement in the process of transition
- **SCALE:** how to "Europeanise" the Convergence concept
- **FUTURE PROSPECTS:** developments you expect, research needs.



CONCLUSIONS

- 1) „convergence policy” does not exist, only SD policy and various sectorial policies; some argument for convergence.
- 2) focus of SDGs has gradually shifted focus: human rights, development issues are better incorporated.
- 3) global equity is not accepted by the EU policies. Job and growth comes first; equity and limits comes only next.
- 4) imminent policy trap: toolbox extend to market-based instruments, green investments - no exit from growth paradigm in the EU policy.
- 5) contraction is encompassed by the EU2020: Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth -- crucial to better incorporate the equity within limits arguments in the EU 2020.
- 6) coherence understood as new focus (conceptual hook) but not radical change in policymaking. No links between DG Env & Dev. Policy coherence can not be successful if organisational setting does not live up to it.
- 7) environmental policy is successful, however reducing inequality (in access to resources) is less realistic.
- 8) convergence regarded adequate for starting reasonable conversations with stakeholders in sustainability debates.
- 9) policies address complex systemic interactions but process level of convergence is entirely missing from EU policies.
- 10) ENGOs could be engaged for the convergence framework.
- 11) evidence needed on successful engagement processes - how we get to the desirable future
- 12) multiple crises offer a favourable governance context, sense of urgency for realworld solutions; bottom-up, networked, participatory policy approaches.
- 13) Convergence as a ‘pre-policy concept’, a plug-in for policy-makers - crosscutting several DGs work and could offer creative space for intergroup meetings at the EU.
- 14) Convergence as a ‘hook’ captures various policy areas and invites to an open debate.

CONVERGE

environment
research
science
society