Sensemaking in EU Innovation Systems: Negotiating Public and Private Interests in the Health Sector

Project subtitle: How policymakers and industry coalitions co-construct meanings and beneficiaries of innovation in European health policy

Department: Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development

Research group: Innovation Studies

Supervisors: Dr. Iryna Susha, Assistant Professor

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Project description

This project investigates how innovation policy in the European health sector is negotiated between public policymakers and private industry coalitions. It explores how these actors make sense of innovation directionality — what it means, how it should be governed, and whose interests it serves. By analysing the narratives and justifications that shape EU innovation governance, the project contributes to broader debates on sustainability transitions, power, and policy dynamics in Europe.

The Bright Minds Assistant will play a key role in developing and applying AI-supported qualitative research methods. The student will work with large language models (LLMs) to collect and organize data from the internet, including stakeholder documents, EU policy papers, press releases, and public statements from industry and political actors. Although the core data sources and overall purpose are already defined, space will be given to the assistant to suggest and test their own ideas about how to explore the interaction between policymakers and industry, particularly through digital and computational approaches.

The position offers hands-on experience in planning and executing automated data collection methods, as well as in more traditional collaborative analysis — including open and thematic coding in NVivo, and learning how such coding can be done collaboratively to handle the large volumes of text generated by digital methods. This role provides an opportunity to explore how emerging AI tools can be integrated responsibly into social science research, combining computational innovation with interpretive and collaborative analytical practices.

Job requirements

- Master's student in Innovation Studies, Governance, Sustainable Development, or a related Geosciences program.
- Strong interest in EU policy, innovation systems, and the role of AI in research.
- Curiosity and motivation to learn how to apply LLMs and Python tools responsibly in social science research (some coding background welcome but **not required**).
- Willingness to engage with qualitative research tasks such as transcription and collaborative coding in NVivo.
- Excellent written and spoken English.
- Strong organizational skills, reliability, and attention to detail.
- A motivated and reflective student who is not afraid to share ideas, experiment, and contribute their own perspective to the research process.

Learning outcomes and benefits

- First-hand experience in AI-assisted qualitative research, including exposure to large language models, Python-based automation, and data ethics.
- Practical understanding of how AI and digital tools can support and complement traditional research practices in the social sciences.
- Early-stage involvement in designing and implementing a real-world research project within an interdisciplinary environment.
- Insights into planning, executing and refining interviews
- Development of skills in collaborative data analysis, including open and thematic coding techniques using NVivo.
- Experience working within an academic research team at the Copernicus Institute for Sustainable Development, with regular supervision and feedback.
- Opportunity to shape research directions, test new methods, and build a unique profile at the intersection of AI, policy, and innovation studies.'