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# What and how do parliaments know? Examining relationships between democracy and knowledge use

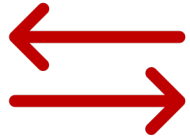
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School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh

Institute for Social Research, Oslo, 10 June 2024

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## Democracy, knowledge and decision-making



Renewed questions over mis- and dis-information in democratic societies, rise of so-called ‘post-truth’ politics, etc.



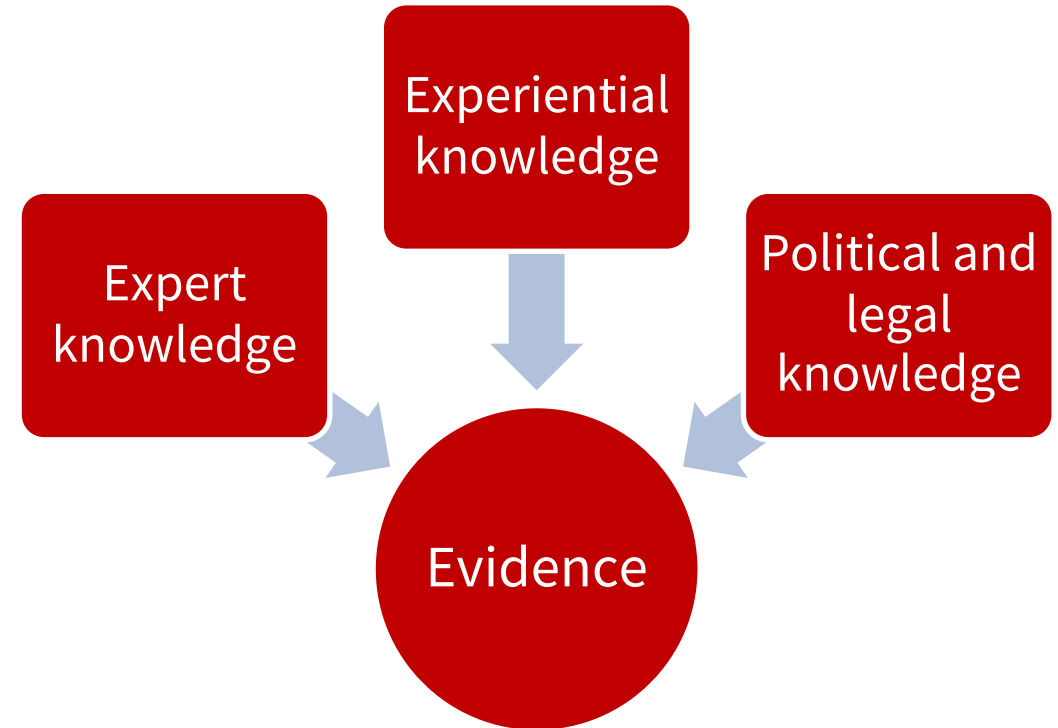
Public satisfaction in political institutions in decline, with some warning political systems at risk



Policy challenges increasing in scale and urgency: Covid-19, climate crisis and social and economic inequalities

## Research on knowledge and politics

- Philosophy: different ways of knowing and interpreting realities,
- Science and Technology Studies (STS) and constructions of ‘science’
- Policy studies: how policy-makers handle different types of research





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## What about parliaments?

- Research less well-developed and perhaps somewhat fragmented, even though:
  - The importance of ‘information’ has been long acknowledged (Krehbiel 1991)
  - And parliaments offer various research-related services
- Existing research focused on:
  - Science and technology assessment (Karaulova and Edler 2023)
  - Institutional access by interest groups (Binderkrantz et al. 2015)
  - Smaller scale and single case studies (Crewe 2017; Turnpenny et al. 2012)
- More has begun to emerge in recent years

A map showing mechanisms used by  
parliaments around the world to access and  
harness academic research

2,473 views

Published on 9 December 2022

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## Map of mechanisms

All items

Developed by Vicky  
Ward and Mark  
Monaghan

[https://ipen-  
network.org/global-  
mapping/](https://ipen-network.org/global-mapping/)

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# About us

The Norwegian Board of Technology is an independent body for technology assessment established by the Norwegian Government in 1999, following an initiative by the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget).

The Board aims to assess impacts and options of technology in all areas of society; to stimulate public debate on technology; and to support the political decision-making process and shaping of technological change.

Current projects include artificial intelligence, mobile health technologies, the future of jobs, driverless cars and foresight and anticipatory governance. The Board furthermore monitors international technological trends and methods for technology assessment and foresight. Its activities are addressed to the Norwegian Parliament, governmental bodies and the public at large.

The NBT has long experience with developing and using participatory methods such as stakeholder involvement, citizens' panels, scenario workshops and open hearings, as well as considerable expertise in anticipatory thinking and scenario building.

The Board in particular makes use of participatory methods in technology assessment in order to strengthen the voice of lay people, and integrates communication into the praxis of technology assessment in order to strengthen the knowledge and debate on science and technology issues.

Norwegian Board of Technology  
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Organisasjonsnummer:  
981 024 125

Du er her: [Om oss](#)

# Om oss

Vår visjon er teknologiråd for fremtidens samfunn. Teknologirådet skal gi Stortinget og øvrige myndigheter nyskapende og begrunnede innspill om ny teknologi, og sette muligheter og utfordringer ved ny teknologi på dagsordenen.

Vi involverer både [eksperter](#), [beslutningstakere](#), [interessenter](#) og [lekfolk](#) i vårt arbeid, og skal fremme en bred offentlig debatt om teknologiutviklingen. Les mer om våre arbeidsmetoder [her](#).

Teknologirådet ble opprettet i 1999, etter [initiativ fra Stortinget](#). Teknologirådet er formelt uavhengig, og bestemmer selv fritt hvilke prosjekter som skal gjennomføres.

[Rådet har 15 medlemmer](#) med stor bredde i kompetanse og bakgrunn. Det ledes av Sverre Gotaas, og møtes ca. 5 ganger i året. Rådet vedtar bl.a. strategi og satsingsområder, og beslutter hvilke prosjekter Teknologirådet skal jobbe med.

Prosjektene ledes og gjennomføres av [sekretariatet](#). Det har ni ansatte, og ledes av direktør Tore Tennøe.

Virksomheten finansieres over Nærings- og fiskeridepartementets post i statsbudsjettet, mens Norges forskningsråd har det forvaltningsmessige og administrative tilsynsansvaret.

## Teknologirådets vedtekter

[LAST NED](#)

## Teknologirådets strategi for 2024-2027

[LAST NED](#)

I 2011 ble Teknologirådet evaluert av NIFU på oppdrag av Nærings- og handelsdepartementet med svært godt resultat. Les hele evalueringsrapporten [her](#).

[Trykk her](#) for å lese Tilgjengelighetserklæring for nettstedet (ekstern lenke som åpnes i ny fane).



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### Dutch MPs trial new 'gold standard' for scientific scrutiny

Parliaments routinely seek scientific advice, but a Dutch pilot goes one step further, asking academics to directly critique what the government is proposing

September 29, 2020

David Matthews

Twitter: @DavidMJourn

Academics have been brought in to directly scrutinise Dutch legislation, chiding the government for vague policy goals and aiming to offer lawmakers evidence-based alternative policies.

While lawmakers the world over routinely get advice from academics, the Dutch pilot scheme, which aims to become a "gold standard" for scientific scrutiny, goes a step further and asks researchers to directly analyse new legislation.

"What is very new here is that with this ap policymaking process," said Pieter Duisent

**nature**

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NEWS | 18 December 2018

### Spain to establish parliamentary office of science

Nation's parliament has budgeted for a new office next year, following push from grassroots scientists' movement.

Michele Catanzaro



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT  
PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

### The Role of Research in the UK Parliament



Dr Caroline Kenny  
Research Associate, Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy, UCL (UCL STEaPP) and Social Science Adviser, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST)

Dr David Christian Rose  
Lecturer in Human Geography, University of East Anglia and former Research Associate at UCL STEaPP

Dr Abbi Hobbs  
Senior Research Associate at UCL STEaPP and Head of the Social Science Section, POST

Dr Chris Tyler  
Director of Public Policy, UCL STEaPP, Co-Investigator and former Director of POST

Dr Jason Blackstock  
Head of Department, UCL STEaPP and Principal Investigator

**Volume one**

Parlament Österreich  
Parlamentsdirektion

### First „Austrian Day of Parliamentary Research“

Announcement and call for contributions

February 2023

Dept. 3.2 – Research and Support in Parliamentary Matters

parlamentsforschung@parlament.gv.at

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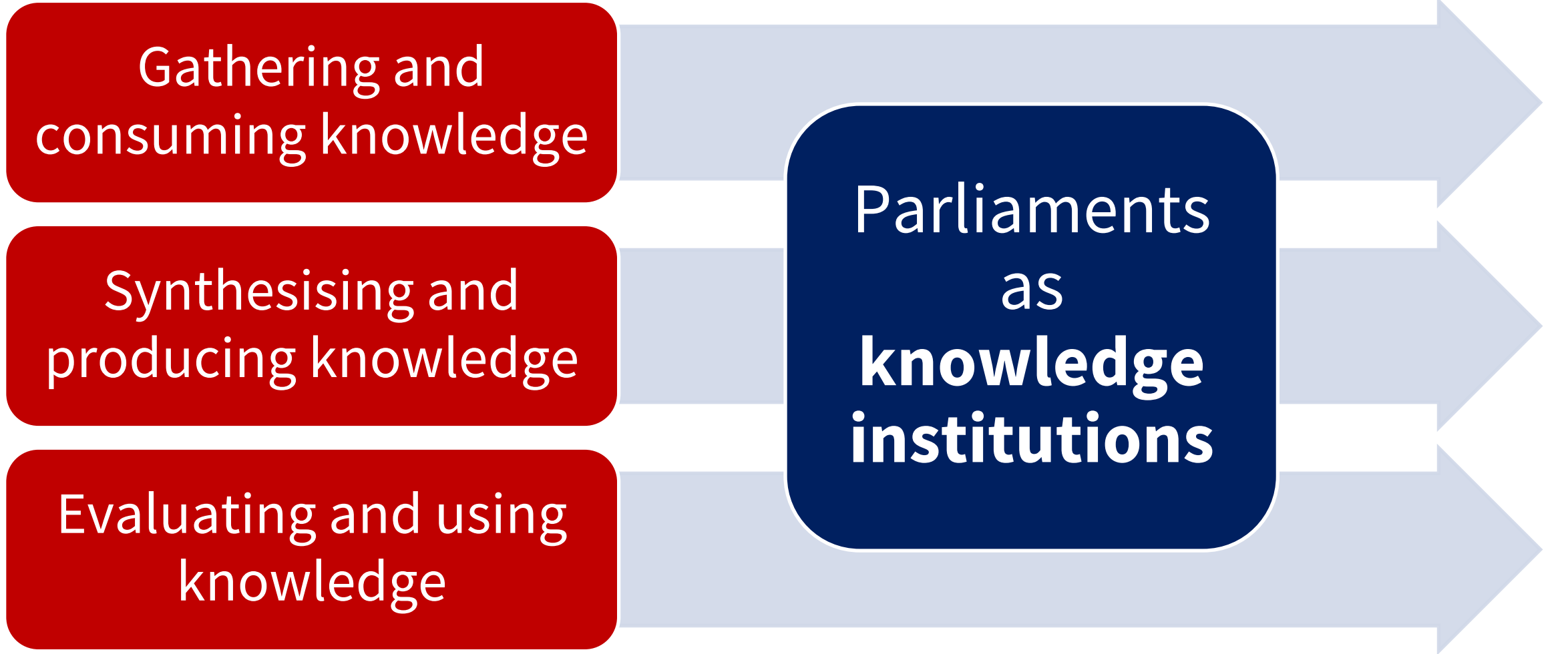




## What about parliaments?

- Foundational to democratic politics and play separate role to governments
  - Representation of the people and interests
  - Accountability of government
  - Scrutinise and pass legislation
- Marginal to policy-making or influential?
  - Significant policy actor overall (e.g. Russell and Cowley 2016)
  - Significant impact on legislation (e.g. Russell and Gover 2017)
- **Parliaments often conceived as ‘political’ and ‘democratic’ institutions**







## Studying Parliaments and the Role of Knowledge - SPARK



To examine and compare patterns of knowledge use in and by parliaments and parliamentary actors



To understand how parliaments and parliamentary actors interpret 'knowledge' and their value



To evaluate the impact of knowledge on democratic functions exercised by parliaments and inform practice

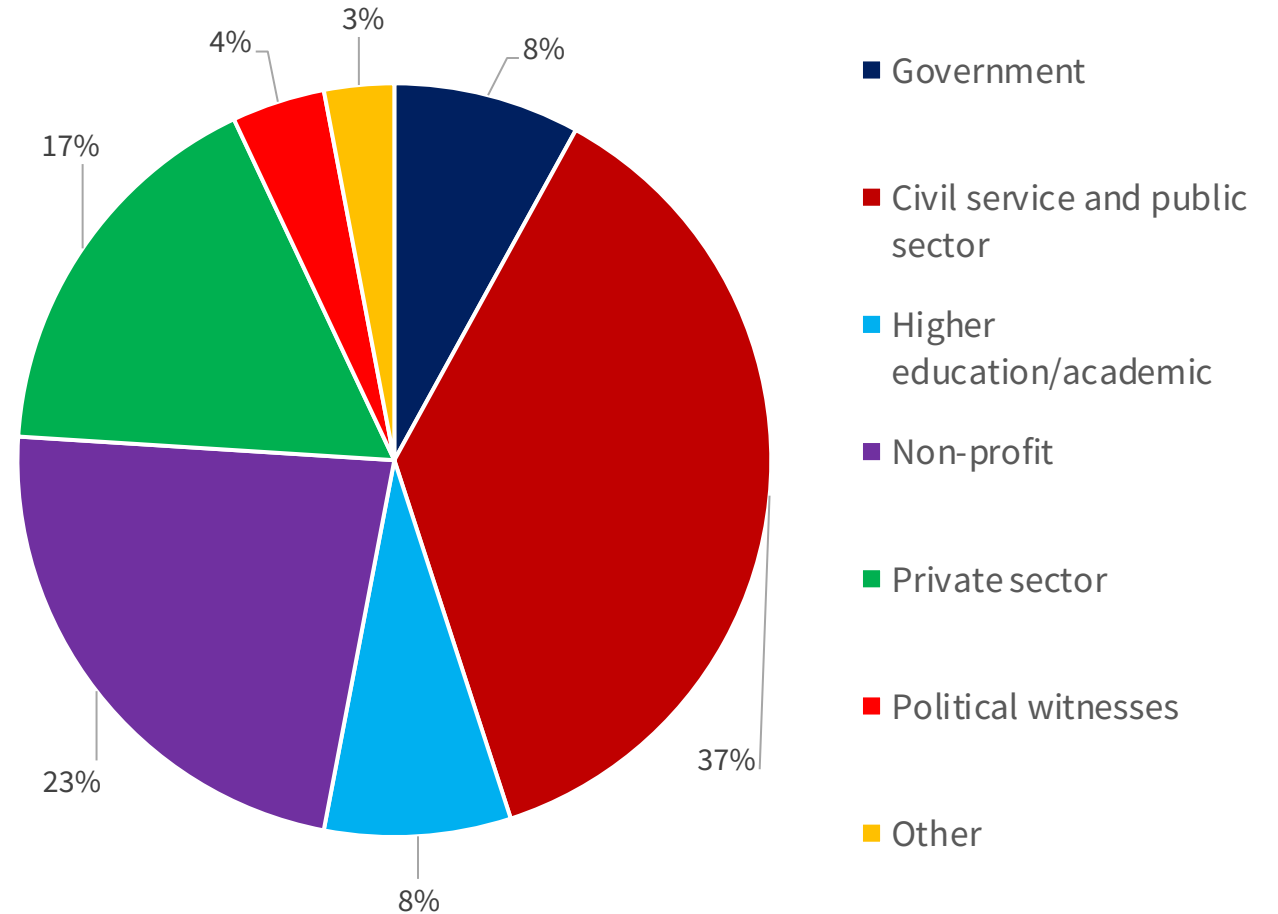


## (1) Patterns of knowledge use

- Questions
  - **RQ1a.** What are the different types of knowledge that are used in parliamentary work and by whom?
  - **RQ1b.** Where, when and under what circumstances are different kinds of knowledge used and by whom?
- Methods and tools
  - Citation analysis
  - Corpus analysis
  - Stakeholder database

## Knowledge base in committees

- Organisational breakdown →
- Gender:
  - 24% women
  - 76% men
- Geography:
  - Dominance of London and South England
- **New data collection ongoing**



Source: Geddes, 2018

# Citations in reports?



House of Commons  
Environmental Audit Committee  
**Building to net zero:  
costing carbon in  
construction**  
First Report of Session 2022–23  
*Report, together with formal minutes re  
to the report*  
*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 11 May 2022*  
HC 103  
Published on 26 May 2022  
by authority of the House of Commons

normal, the costs of the low embodied carbon building should be lower than the cost of the high embodied carbon building, however it is obviously down to what is normal in industry and what skillsets people have.

If we replace a concrete frame and all brick and block houses with timber-framed houses, then you can reduce embodied carbon by about half. However, if you do not have the skillset to do that, and if you do not have the supply chains to provide that, you will not realise those cost savings. In theory, it should be a cost saving.<sup>41</sup>

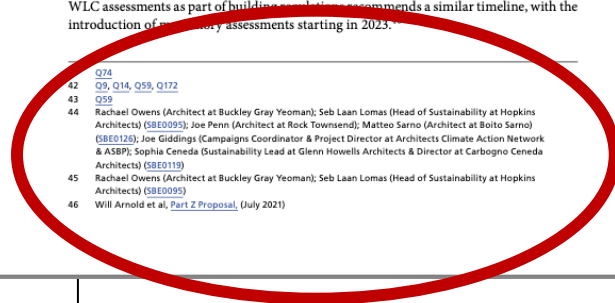
30. There was consensus in the evidence we heard that the standardisation of the WLC assessment process, through regulation, would substantially reduce costs. This in turn would reduce the costs of low-carbon construction.

### Scheduling the introduction of whole-life carbon assessments

31. Government commitments to the introduction of WLC assessments have lacked a clear timeline for implementation, an issue consistently raised by our witnesses.<sup>42</sup> Dr Gieseckam told us that while the Heat and Buildings Strategy and the Net Zero Strategy represented "a step forward on embodied carbon in terms of there being some future commitments around it", the timeline was "very vague". He said:

In particular, in the net zero strategy, we had the statement that, "Government aims to support action in the construction sector by improving reporting on embodied carbon in buildings and infrastructure with a view to exploring a maximum level for new builds in the future."<sup>43</sup> We also saw, in the Government's response [...] to the annual progress report from the Committee on Climate Change [for 2021], a commitment again around embodied carbon but, again, with no timeline stating when they intended to enact this or what the details of that would be.<sup>44</sup>

32. The architects who gave evidence to us consistently recommended that a clear timeline for the adoption of WLC assessment as a mandatory requirement for construction was needed to increase professional knowledge and capability in embodied carbon and provide the necessary signals for the construction industry to invest in managing it.<sup>44</sup> The Architects Climate Action Network have recommended that mandatory reporting be introduced in 2022, followed by the introduction of limit values in 2025, which will then be reduced over time.<sup>45</sup> The Part Z campaign, which seeks to introduce mandatory WLC assessments as part of building regulations, recommends a similar timeline, with the introduction of mandatory assessments starting in 2023.<sup>46</sup>



- 42 Q74
- 43 Q9, Q14, Q59, Q172
- 44 Rachael Owens (Architect at Buckley Gray Yeoman); Seb Laan Lomas (Head of Sustainability at Hopkins Architects) (SBE0295); Joe Penn (Architect at Rock Townsend); Matteo Sarno (Architect at Bolto Sarno) (SBE0126); Joe Giddings (Campaigns Coordinator & Project Director at Architects Climate Action Network & ASBP); Sophia Ceneda (Sustainability Lead at Glenn Howells Architects & Director at Carbogno Ceneda Architects) (SBE0119)
- 45 Rachael Owens (Architect at Buckley Gray Yeoman); Seb Laan Lomas (Head of Sustainability at Hopkins Architects) (SBE0295)
- 46 Will Arnold et al, [Part Z Proposal](#), (July 2021)

References in speeches?

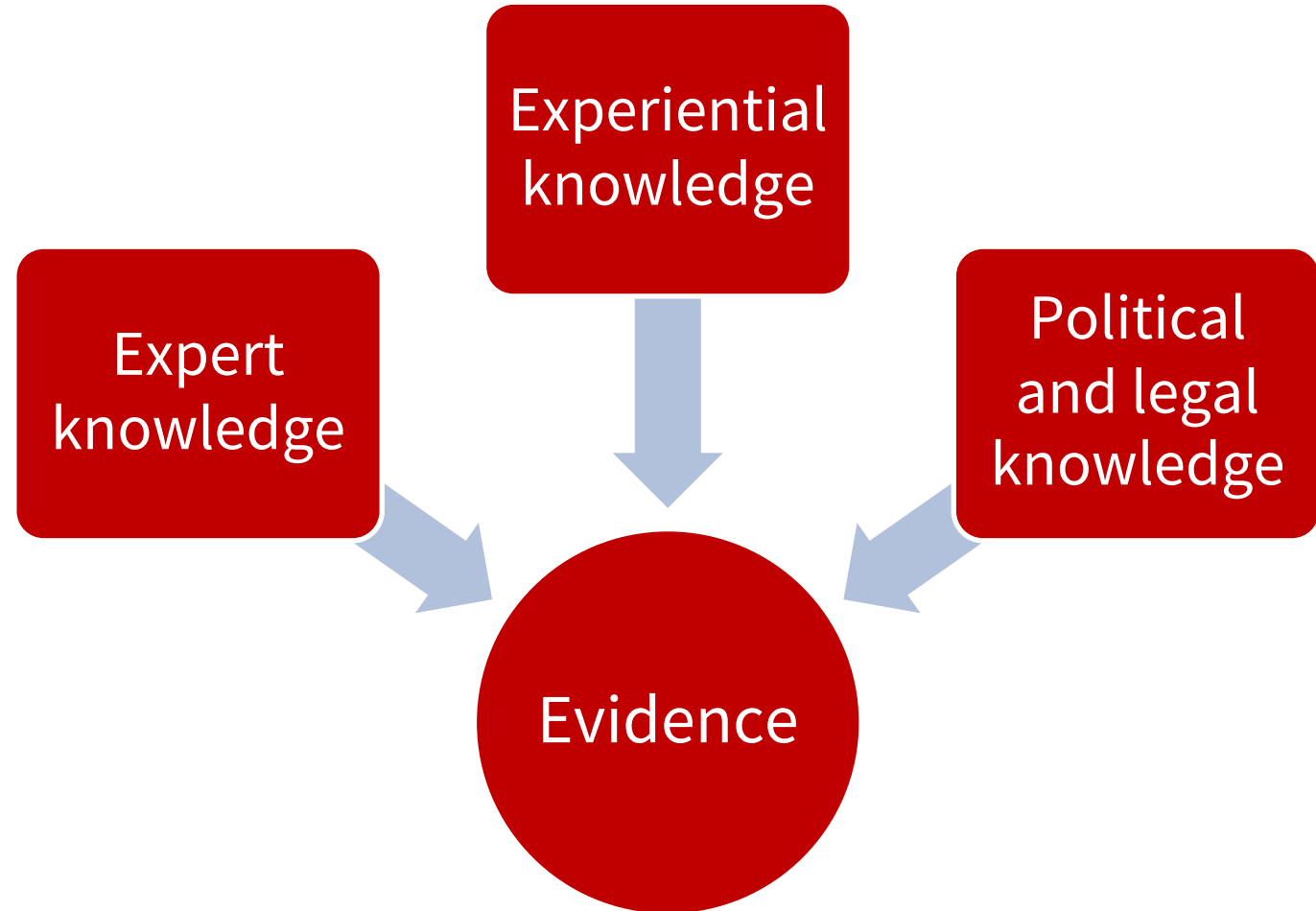




## (2) Beliefs and values underpinning knowledge use

- Questions
  - **RQ2a.** How do parliamentary actors interpret the value of different kinds of knowledge?
  - **RQ2b.** What types of knowledge are perceived as ‘authoritative’ or ‘useful’?
- Methods and tools
  - Interviews
  - Observation
  - Qualitative text analysis

## Exploring ‘knowledge’ and ‘evidence’?





## Previous research: identifying ‘good’ evidence

- What counts?
  - Who, why and to what effect are important
  - MPs use evidence to be informed not persuaded
- Changing practices
  - Emphasis on lived experience and representativeness
  - Process pushing it to its limits?
- Challenges for committees
  - What principles underpin different uses of evidence (esp. lived exp)?
  - Pressures on staff: time-poor, resource imbalances, training around innovations

January 2023

### Good Evidence?

How do select committees use evidence to support their work?

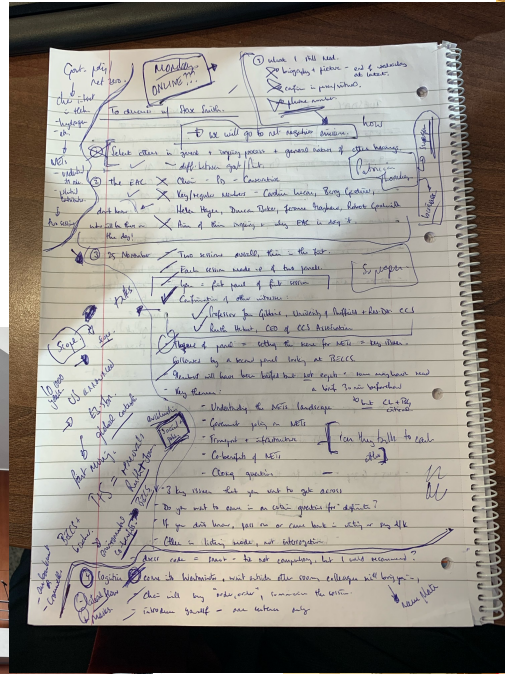
Findings from a Parliamentary Academic Fellowship Scheme project

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# Performance in committees?



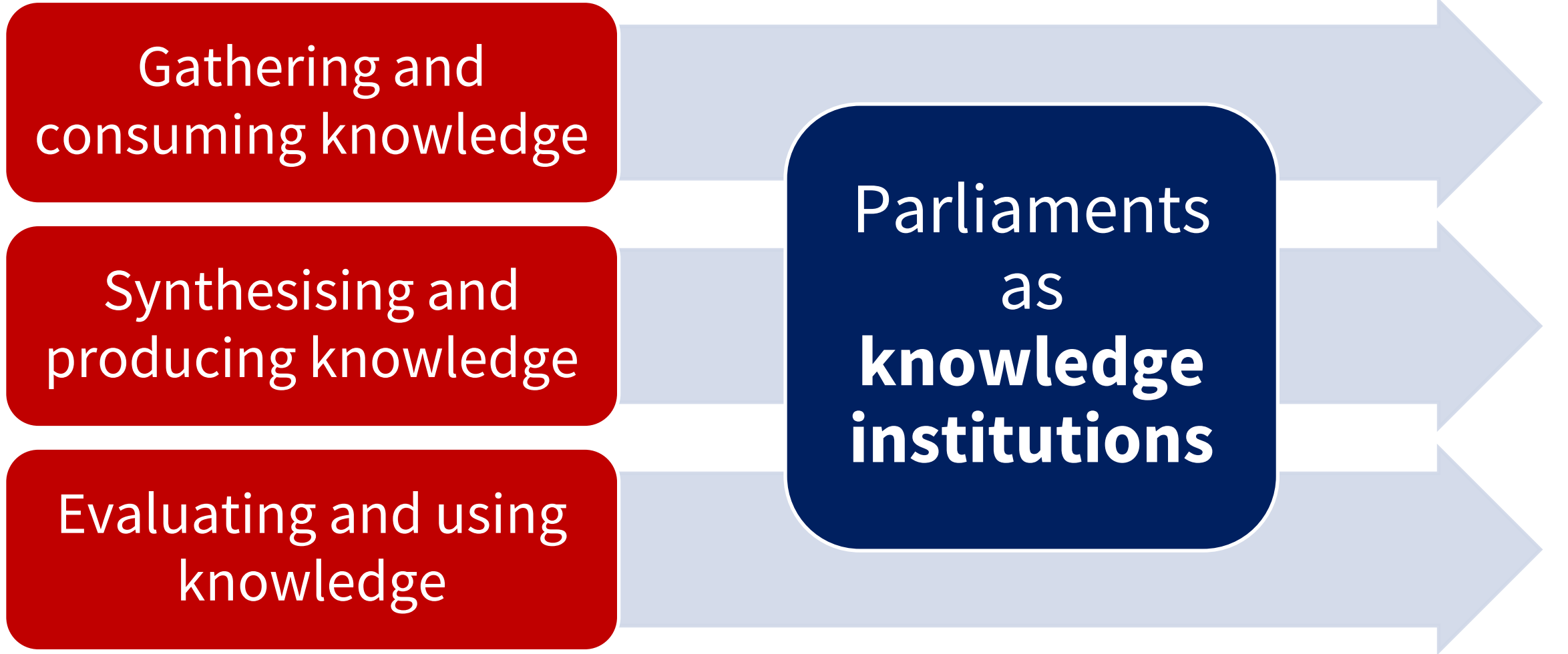




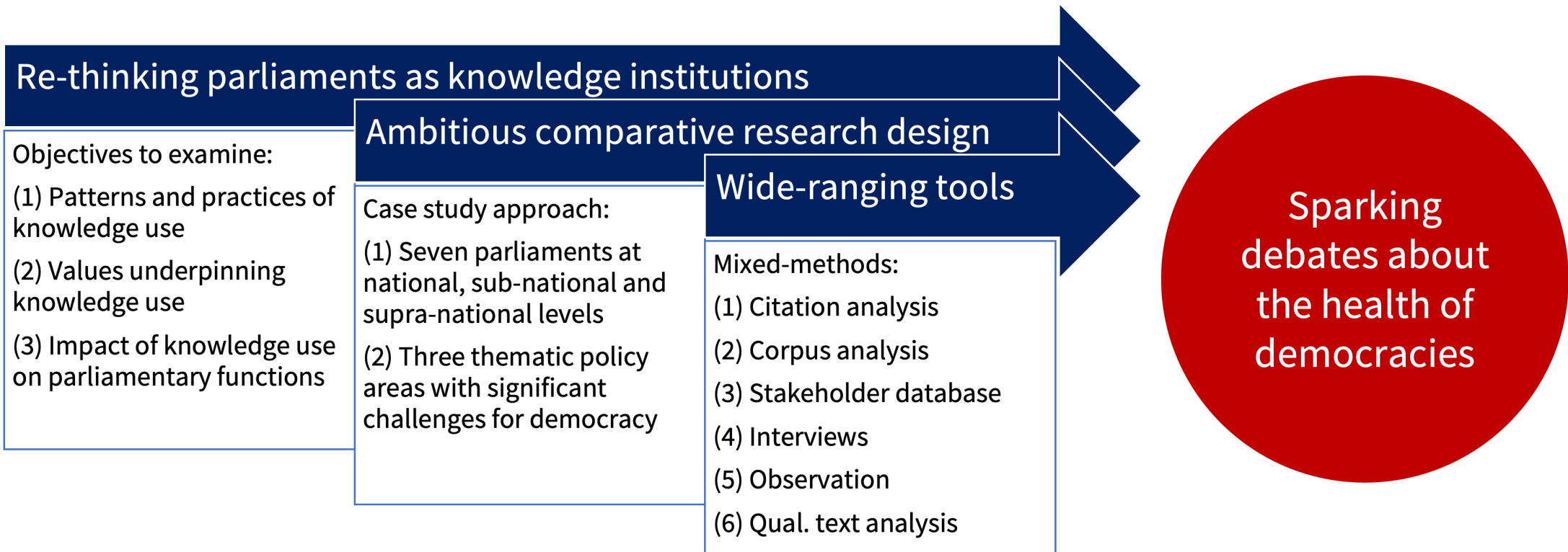
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## (3) The impact of knowledge use in democratic decision-making

- Questions
  - **RQ3a.** In what ways does the use of knowledge affect key parliamentary functions?
  - **RQ3b.** What is the impact of parliaments on the wider relationship between knowledge and democracy?
- Through a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative insights in O1 and O2



## Studying Parliaments and the Role of Knowledge (SPARK)

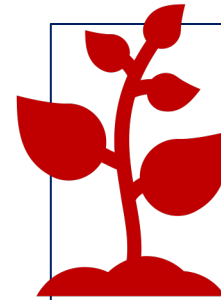


# Case study parliaments





**Healthcare policy**



**Environmental policy**



**Welfare policy**





**Phases, 2024-29**

→ Phase **1**: Project start-up (6m) *[now]*

→ Phase **2**: Quantitative data-gathering (18m)

→ Phase **3**: Qualitative data-gathering (18m)

→ Phase **4**: Synthesis and analysis (18m)

→ Phase **5**: Outputs and impact (18m)



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# Thank you!

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