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D7.732 LAUNCH OF RESEARCH AGENDA IN BRUSSELS

INTRODUCTION

This final ECOPAS Deliverable is has seen quite a different development from what was foreseen at the outset. The original intention was that intensive work under Work Package 7 in project period 2 would result in a document outlining a broad social science and humanities research agenda on the Pacific, from a European perspective, to be submitted and formally launched to the European Commission at the end of the project period.

However, the Deliverable turned out to be destined for a much more cumulative and complex process, which has been inspiring and rewarding for the entire ECOPAS Consortium. The end result is hereby submitted by the Project Coordinator as part of Work Package 7, on behalf of the Consortium and all Work Packages.

Although a lack of convergence between the project's time schedules and those of the applicable European Union offices did not allow for a presentation meeting in the latter half of 2015, we envisage that the recommendations and proposals provided here can form the basis for a high-level event in Brussels in 2016. We would welcome an exploration of such opportunities, as already started in discussions with DG-RTD at the end of the project period.

PROCESS

In the project’s first months, ECOPAS launched an ambitious programme of knowledge exchange and dialogue involving the Consortium’s scholars, representatives of the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), European parliamentarians, and the Pacific diplomatic corps resident in Brussels. Already from the first run of those activities in Brussels in 2013 – especially the launching of the ECOPAS project in the European Parliament with a range of Commission and Parliament representatives and Pacific Islands diplomats present – a steady stream of ideas, suggestions and recommendations for future research started to come in for further discussion, evaluation and elaboration by Consortium Participants.

The foundations of a future, long-term agenda for policy-oriented social science and humanities research in and on the Pacific was, then, already laid early on in the project period. WP7 was originally not scheduled to step up its activities until about month 12, but a continuous discussion on research priorities and definitions of agendas in fact evolved through meetings already during the first year – meetings of the ECOPAS Executive Board and Scientific Advisory Board (March and December 2013) and of the ECOPAS European Work Package leaders and the Board of ESfO, the European Society of Oceanists (September 2013), and in several meetings of WP1 and WP3 representatives with European Commission and EEAS personnel in Brussels.

Significant further expansions of ECOPAS efforts in the research-and-policy field took place already from late 2013.

The ECOPAS conference *Restoring the Human to Climate Change in Oceania*, held in Suva, Fiji 6-9 December was massively successful in terms of having an unprecedented multitude of Pacific Islanders – state leaders, politicians, diplomats, scholars, artists, activists, youth representatives – voice their concerns about climate change. The general climate change focus of the ECOPAS Work Programme thereby proved to be far from restrictive, allowing for a holistic perception of the entire range of current concerns, ambitions and alternatives held and offered by the people of the Pacific for the challenges of the present time. Deliverable D7.721, ECOPAS Policy Brief No. 1 (*Restoring the Human to Climate Change in Oceania: Voices and Perspectives from the Pacific*), distributed in hard copy and online, conveyed the extraordinary momentum of the conference to a wider audience.

These experiences from the Suva conference contributed significantly and directly to the implementation by ECOPAS of a comprehensive review of the European Union’s development cooperation with the Pacific. The study was commissioned in November 2013 by the European Parliament’s Committee on Development, and was delivered formally to the Parliament in a high-profile meeting of the Committee in April 2014, with EEAS and European Commission representatives present.¹ The deepened understandings afforded by this commissioned review, carried out by ECOPAS outside of the Work Programme as a tangential benefit indicating rapidly increased awareness in Brussels of Consortium’s

¹ Borrevik, C., T. Crook, E. Hviding and C. Lind (2014) *European Union Development Strategy in the Pacific*. Brussels: Policy Department, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union. ISBN 978-92-823-5763-7. Doi: 10.2861/6397. 43p.

expertise, led to increasingly wider dialogues with the European Commission (across a number of DGs) and EEAS staff on future scenarios for an expanded research programme. This process also saw the valuable involvement of a cross-DG informal 'Friends of the Pacific' group, consisting of DG staff directly engaged in cooperation with the Pacific.

Deliverable D7.722, ECOPAS Policy Brief No. 2 (*Re-Thinking Europe-Pacific Relationships in Development Cooperation*) summarised key dimensions of these insights, and was distributed widely as hard copy and online, leading to further dialogue within and outside of the Consortium.

The Policy Implementation Plan (Deliverable D1.131) evaluated and analysed the ECOPAS project's key findings at multiple research-and-policy interfaces built by the Work Programme in 2013-2014, and placed the observations and recommendations in the context of research needs for reconceptualising Europe-Pacific relations, proposing elements of an agenda for future research. The drafting and completion of the Policy Implementation Plan was, then, carried out over a considerably longer time frame than originally intended and stated in Annex I. The Policy Implementation Plan, although primarily intended for internal Consortium discussion and planning, also proved useful for consultations with the European Commission and EEAS, and for sharing of ideas with potential additional research partners in a new Work Programme.

The initial Objective of launching a research agenda in Brussels at the end of the project period can therefore be re-conceptualised as a chronological, cumulative series of events spaced throughout the duration of the ECOPAS project. The present Deliverable summarises this sequence, and synthesises research recommendations on the basis of the substantial number and wide range of events and sources. Here is an overview of the main fora for initiation, discussion, planning and presentation from 2012 to 2015:

- **5 December 2012:** Opening Plenary at 9th ESfO Conference, Bergen / *Climate Change Challenges and European-Pacific Cooperation: Building Institutional Research Frameworks for the Future* (an introduction of the ECOPAS initiative and Work Programme to the European Society for Oceanists and a global community of Pacific scholars, with representatives of the Commission and EEAS present)
- **20 March 2013:** 'Pacific Connections' Roundtable 1 / *Restoring the Human to Climate Change in the Pacific* (European Parliament, Brussels)
- **29 May 2013:** 'Pacific Connections' Roundtable 2 / *Pacific Sustainability* (EEAS, Brussels)
- **30 May 2013:** 'Pacific Connections' Roundtable 3 / *Re-thinking Gender in the Pacific* (EEAS, Brussels)
- **6-9 December 2013:** 'Restoring the Human to Climate Change in Oceania', ECOPAS Conference (Suva, Fiji)
- **7 April 2014:** Presentation to the European Parliament Committee on Development of the commissioned study *European Union Development Strategy in the Pacific* (Brussels)
- **11 April 2014:** 'Pacific Connections' Roundtable 4 / *Social Impacts of Climate Change in the Pacific* (EEAS, Brussels)

- **5 June 2014:** ECOPAS state-of-the art presentation on Europe-Pacific relations, to *Research Meets Diplomacy* conference (DG-RTD, Brussels)
- **5 September 2014:** Submission of Deliverable D1.131 *Policy Implementation Plan*
- **25 September 2014:** Original submission of ECOPAS Deliverable D7.722 Policy Brief No. 2 / *Re-thinking Europe-Pacific Relationships in Development Cooperation*
- **15 October 2014:** 'Pacific Connections' Roundtable 5 / *What Future for Fisheries in the Pacific?* (EEAS, Brussels)
- **27 June 2015:** 'Pacific Connections' Roundtable 6 / *Future EU-Pacific Connections* (Closing Plenary Discussion and ECOPAS General Assembly at the 10th Conference of the European Society for Oceanists, Brussels).

The overview attests to the extraordinary scope of dialogues of knowledge exchange made possible by the ECOPAS grant and the Work Programme, in Europe and in the Pacific. As a rule, the Brussels events listed included a combination of prominent Pacific scholars from within and beyond the Consortium (including on most occasions colleagues from Pacific Islands institutions), relevant representatives of the European Commission (across the applicable DGs and including DG-RTD) and EEAS, and Pacific Islands diplomats resident in Brussels. At the final event, which saw the presentation of research and policy priorities and agendas to the closing plenary of *Europe and the Pacific*, the 10th conference of European Society for Oceanists, an audience of about 300 scholars and additional Commission and EEAS staff and Pacific diplomats was addressed and involved in discussion.

PACIFIC CONTEXT

ECOPAS built its Work Programme (2012-2015) on the premise that the Pacific Islands region is the geographically most dispersed, and the biologically and culturally most diverse, region of the world. Across thousands of kilometres in the Equatorial and southern Pacific Ocean, small and large groups of islands constitute culturally distinct nations with populations ranging from a few thousand (e.g., Tuvalu, Tokelau, Niue) to several million (Papua New Guinea). While subsistence-based rural economies reliant on small-scale fishing and agriculture continue to be strong in many Pacific nations, rapid inroads are made by global agents of large-scale resource extraction, resulting in an increasing range of environmental problems, and urban sectors are rapidly growing. Systems of government are also diverse, building on diverse colonial histories involving mainly British, French, Australian, and US imperial power. Some of the largest Pacific nations (Fiji, Solomon Islands) have experienced coups and state disruptions, and some degree of foreign intervention, such as the Australia-led RAMSI operation in Solomon Islands. These political upheavals have also had significant impact on the Pacific's regional organisations, such as in the case of Fiji's post-coup suspension from the Pacific Islands Forum in 2009. The Pacific also includes sizeable territories that remain to a large degree under French colonial rule; notably New Caledonia and French Polynesia; and the Western half of the great continental island of New Guinea is governed by Indonesia under a regime of considerable local contestation.

Politically, the independent nations of the Pacific Islands region are characterized by a significant level of international regional cooperation, partly as a function of the disparate scales of its nations. This takes the form of pan-Pacific institutions and bodies such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Forum, the recently established Pacific Islands Development Forum, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme, and the University of the South Pacific.

The Pacific Islands region thus represents a globally unique diversity of nations, state formations and regional, inter-country mechanisms for the management of natural resources. With high levels of biodiversity, and harbouring certain resource stocks of strong international significance (in particular, about two thirds of the world's tuna), the small islands developing states (SIDS) of the tropical Pacific engage with the outside world in regionally specific, oftentimes unexpected and unconventional, ways. These island nations have a central role in the contestation over, competition for, and conservation of some of the world's key resources, far surpassing their modest size in terms of land mass and population. In fact some of the smallest Pacific nations control EEZs of vast scale, and express their sovereignty as independent states first and foremost through control over the ocean and its resources. Despite a small total population, the Pacific Islands region is a resource area and a geopolitical zone of high global significance.

The situation of the Pacific Islands in terms of climate change and its environmental effects – low contribution, massive exposure – is well known, and in this field Pacific SIDS are major global players through the influential roles of their diplomatic representatives and task-oriented organisations in UN contexts and elsewhere, as seen, for example, through the Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership and through the powerful global interventions at COP21 by small island nations of the Pacific.

All these factors make for great diversity and high complexity. It is not always clear to the Asian, North American and European actors in Pacific resource extraction, sustainable development and development cooperation how to pursue their ambitions in encounters with Pacific SIDS representatives, be it at multilateral negotiating tables or in bilateral programme talks. Even the continuous, long-established interactions between Pacific SIDS and the regional powers of Australia and New Zealand are fraught at times with conflict and misunderstanding. While Asian interests in the Pacific are fundamentally tied to resource extraction, and North American interests are largely strategic, European engagements in the Pacific take place on a combined background of geopolitics and ambitions of sustainable development of human and natural resources.

The complexity of local, national and regional politics and policy-making in the Pacific may, if properly analysed and understood, provide important lessons to the world and be instructive for devising new approaches to the management of natural resources, to addressing the effects of climate change, and to international policy in general.

Observations developed by the ECOPAS Consortium through the Work Programme's three years represent a significant level of analytical insights and stand for the level of research-based understanding collectively held by the ECOPAS Consortium, further developed through intensive dialogue with regional Pacific organisations and European Union agencies during the project's diverse interactions over the years. The findings are summarised here in terms of

forming a foundation for an agenda of policy-relevant research strategies at the EU-Pacific crossroads.

1. The peoples of the Pacific Islands have a long and distinguished history of meeting the peoples of other regions of the world in their own social and cultural terms, and of engaging with outsiders through their own economic and political interests. Through increasing accommodation of this perspective in the Pacific's interaction with major aid donors, the region's dependency on donor-recipient models in development cooperation is now a thing of the past. Furthermore, in geopolitical terms, the Pacific region is now an increasingly diverse foreign policy field for a number of major states (including not only Australia, New Zealand, the EU and the United States, but also China, Indonesia and others). This gives Pacific countries new choices to make in foreign policy and development cooperation, a situation which requires a well-informed approach by competing donors, and in which the EU, for example, must meet its particular challenges through the building of knowledge.
2. It is simplistic and unhelpful to approach the Pacific as anything but a thoroughly heterogeneous, diverse, multi-layered and uneven 'region'. While the region includes some of the smallest nations of the world, Papua New Guinea on the other hand has by far the largest land mass, population and economy, and is increasingly significant for, and economically powerful in, the wider region.
3. Given the depth and breadth of what we know as social scientists about Pacific political and exchange systems, we should anticipate that the region's new geopolitical currency is a willingness to seriously engage with emerging definitions of an equal, two-way, partnership relation in Pacific terms; definitions that expand beyond the monetary dimension of cooperation.
4. All existing and future development progress in the Pacific is vulnerable to climate change that has already brought rising sea levels, and variable weather systems that pose immediate risks to livelihoods. Any analysis of future scenarios for the Pacific must take climate change, and the terms of local perceptions of problems and solutions, as central concerns.
5. The ECOPAS project has progressed during a watershed moment for Pacific relations with the wider world, including the European Union. Both of the EU's principal regional partnerships, the Pacific members of the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific group and the Pacific Islands Forum, published reviews that are instructive for future Pacific-EU relations. The Pacific reviews also identify issues of human resource and institutional capacity constraints, and a strong preference to reduce aid fragmentation by more directly increasing the use of national priorities and in-country systems. Crucially, they depict development as something that happens through supra-national agency, and call for more relationally equal and democratically accountable partnerships for development.
6. While the reviews recognize that the Pacific is significantly off-track to meet many of the Millennium Development Goals, and endorse the conventional view of small, remote, isolated and dependent economies vulnerable to pressures on natural

resources and climate change, they also foreground the centrality of culture, religion and societal values and the importance of Pacific-defined 'blue-green growth'. There is an urgent need to deepen such understandings in terms of taking into account the cultural and social aspects of development strategies. The key issue here is to understand and respond to critiques of donor-led and 'top-down' development, that is, to examine the ways in which decisions are made, and the kinds of decisions that are made, and to consider whether the current process of projects is able to design and deliver projects that are appropriate and workable at the local level of development ownership. This is a fertile scene not only for intensive fieldwork-based research, but also for the difficult tasks of creating new alternatives in policy-making for the development project sector.

PACIFIC FUTURES: PROPOSALS FOR A RESEARCH AGENDA

On this background, and in the light of a rapidly intensifying diversity of Pacific initiatives towards re-conceptualizing the relationships of development assistance and cooperation, the diverse scenes of Pacific-European interaction are of high interest for to research and policy from the perspectives of both European and Pacific Islands researchers and policy-makers. One particular feature of Pacific island nations provides an extraordinary research opportunity: the politics of island nations are compressed in scale, with a small number of actors engaging each other on a large and diverse range of issues. Most capital towns in the Pacific Islands provide immediate access to observations of where, when and how policy is actually made, as national, regional and global representatives meet and interact in a matrix of situations where many different issues may involve the same individuals in different capacities.

An ambitious multidisciplinary programme of field research by a combination of social anthropologists, political scientists, law scholars, environmental scientists and others, across a wide range of policy-making scenes in the Pacific, in Europe and globally where natural resources and climate change policy are at stake, will throw new light on these scenes and promise path-breaking contributions to agendas of and models for policy-relevant research

Such a programme is envisaged by ECOPAS as involving close, long-term relationships with key policy-makers and policy-making scenes in the Pacific and in Europe. Innovative advisory mechanisms will be established as research is developed. Thus, as a departure from long-standing (and often misinformed) concerns about shortcomings of Pacific 'governance', and on the background of Pacific reorientation away from Australian regional dominance, ECOPAS proposes that a substantial research programme on the diversity of Pacific policy, across a wide range of sectors and topics, is established. Its focus shall be on the Pacific-European axis along the dimensions described above, with close attention to certain key Pacific concerns such as fisheries management, climate change and blue-green growth initiatives.

The complexity of national, regional and global policy-making in the Pacific may, if properly analysed and understood, provide important lessons to the world and be instructive for devising new approaches to the management of natural resources, to addressing the effects of climate change, and to international policy in general. To this end, the proposed research programme will include a major new PhD programme of interdisciplinary environmental

policy to be established at the University of the South Pacific, the region's premier institution of research and higher learning.

The core concept of 'Pacific Connections' has stood as a trademark for the ECOPAS Work Programme: relationships have been opened, built and developed in the broadest possible sense between Europe and the Pacific, through processes ranging from a stock-taking of existing research on climate change in a Pacific context, via the provision of channels for dialogue between scholarship and policy-making, to the definition of a long-term research agenda for meeting the range of current and future challenges faced by the Pacific Islands.

Building on these achievements reached and insights learned, we here propose a three-dimensional strategy for future European-funded social science and humanities research on the Pacific in the 21st century: first, reaching a deeper holistic understanding of the great region of Oceania; second, implementing a profound analytical re-thinking of relations between the Pacific and Europe in terms of 'development cooperation'; and third, developing an ambition of a total re-making of those relationships into an approach that privileges Pacific perspectives. Europe is likely to be both challenged and inspired by following the Pacific Islands – or the great maritime region of Oceania – into the 21st century.

Reaching a Deeper Understanding of the Pacific

The ECOPAS Consortium recommends that the European Union should give attention to, and support research on, the following areas of special interest:

- Understanding sustainable development in local forms – thereby recognise how Pacific people perceive resource extraction and development projects in their own vernacular terms and through their own kinship and cosmological connections – and that the design and outcomes of such projects will be more successful if this is acknowledged and taken seriously.
- Developing selected regional research projects focused on inshore and high-seas fisheries, gender and inequality, customary land matters, climate change, food security, and policy-making process on national and regional levels, in order to better understand the shared concerns that bind Pacific countries together, and the distinctive local manifestations of these concerns and responses to them.
- Exploring examples of self-sufficient communities that represent a moving away from 'cultures of dependency' – thereby addressing critical factors for building resilience among the people of the Pacific Islands.
- Recognising the importance of local community structures to ensure project success, in particular when it comes to micro-projects that depend on positive feedback on the ground.

Re-Thinking EU-Pacific Development Cooperation

We recommend that the European Union should give attention to, and support research on, the following areas of special interest:

- In recognition of Pacific diversity, explore a similar diversification of development cooperation, rather than an approach of 'one size fits all'.
- Develop positions and approaches beyond the donor-recipient relationship to attain an increased focus on cooperation, and prioritise simplified, more effective routines for disbursement of funding from the recipient perspective.
- In view of the several recent calls for a mature development partnership and the critique of donor-led development evidenced by the recent review mentioned above, and the emergence of the Pacific Islands Development Forum as a regional sustainable development organisation in which Australia and New Zealand are not members, reviews are needed on how best to balance donor coordination from the point of view of the EU and taking Pacific aspirations into account.

A Re-Making of EU-Pacific Relationships

We recommend that the European Union should give attention to, and support research on, the following areas of special interest:

- From sustained research, develop a better understanding of Pacific regionalism as new forms of sovereignty and citizenship may develop, challenged, for example, by imminent climate change induced migrations.
- Recognise that development cooperation with regional partners such as Australia, and coordination with regional bodies such as the Asia Development Bank, is vital, but that the EU also needs to strengthen its own identity in its own right, by raising the profile of its support and assistance more directly.
- Build a future relationship between the EU and the Pacific explicitly grounded in, and motivated by, a distinctiveness and directness between partners in their own right, with concrete ambitions beyond geopolitical interests.
- Give attention to the role of the quality of higher education in the Pacific as key to the region's future development capacity. The EU should examine ways to support the education of the next generation of university and college educators to develop globally and locally relevant knowledge, skills and critical capacities. There is a particular need, as ECOPAS sees it, to develop innovative, multidisciplinary higher-degree training programmes in the fields of policy research, regional natural resource management, and climate change.

Understanding Oceania

Finally, we wish to propose some more general recommendations on how a research agenda that brings Pacific perspectives to the foreground should be designed and implemented.

In the Pacific today, there are many notable examples of Pacific-designed solutions to global challenges. Where outsiders look for 'governance', Pacific people see multiple levels and configurations of 'leadership' grounded in both the local and the global. Where development programmers from Europe and North America see cultural and political differences measured across a distance between 'Western' and 'Pacific' approaches, Pacific people increasingly view this through a wider dimension that includes the 'East', i.e. Asian interests. Where political observers see 'small island nations', the inhabitants of those places see 'great ocean states'.

From such a set of perspectives, and many more like them, a re-conceptualisation of the great maritime region of Oceania can be achieved through innovative approaches to research, where scholars from Europe, the Pacific and elsewhere join forces in a shared quest for understanding how 'the Pacific Islands' can be reconceptualised as Oceania – a huge place not characterised by smallness, as argued first and most forcefully in Epeli Hau'ofa's seminal work 'Our Sea of Islands'.²

In the 21st century, Oceania is a unique part of the world where huge marine resources of global significance are managed under non-conventional, transnational versions of sovereignty, where forced future migrations of entire national populations caused by sea-level rise involve new transnational solutions outside of conventional citizen-sovereignty equations, and where climate change, transnationalism, regionalism, governance, sovereignty and citizenship, philosophies and cosmologies, gender, egalitarianism and inequality, old, new, analogic and digital, may emerge in new, uniquely Pacific manifestations – all in a collective search for 'security of life in the world's largest ocean'.³

² Hau'ofa, Epeli (1994) 'Our Sea of Islands'. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6 (1): 148-61. See also Hau'ofa, Epeli (2008) *We are the Ocean: Selected Works*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

³ Veitayaki, Joeli (2015) 'Ocean in Us: Security of Life in the World's Largest Ocean'. Keynote address to *Europe and the Pacific*, 10th conference of the European Society for Oceanists, Brussels, 24-27 June 2015.