Author’s response to reviews

Title: Smorgasbord or Symphony? Assessing public health nutrition policies across 30 European countries using a novel framework: A mixed methods study

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
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Smorgasbord or Symphony? Assessing public health nutrition policies across 30 European countries using a novel framework: A mixed methods study

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Version: 2 Date: 21st August 2014

Author's response to reviews: see over
Response to reviewers

Reviewer 1
Reviewer: Prof Lars Ryden

INTRODUCTION
A comprehensive overview of available information outlining source, strengths and above all limitations.

Thank you

OBJECTIVE
Broad of general interest and well phrased

Thank you

METHODS
Page 4 line 133 and following
If this report should have the format of a scientific publication ethics is usually put by the end of the section. Presently it seems scattered and the authors are recommended to make the description once and focused.

Thank you. The ethics statement has now been moved to the end of the methods section (P. 7/8 line 251-257)

Page 4 line 138
What do the authors mean with “relevant ethics committee”?

Thank you. The word “relevant” has been deleted. (P.8 line 256)

Page 4 lines 141-144
This part does not relate to ethics as indicated in the sub-title. The text is better located elsewhere in the methods section.

Thank you. This section is now moved to the introduction paragraph of the Methods section. (P. 4 line 141-144)

Page 4-5 lines 146-151
This is a very vague description. The authors are recommended to be much more specific on how the study was conducted. It is possible to avoid to lengthy text by referring to appended text. Just now the reader is only informed on the general outline in the form of subtitles. Even when looking at the report on Work package 5 in EUROHEART II, the description of these issues is very limited.

Thank you. The study protocol has now been added as Appendix 1.

Page 5 line 153 and following
Did the methods change over time due to the discussions or what exactly was the outcome or intention with the quality control discussions? Even this part seems rather vague.
Thank you. The purpose of the Quality Control Advisory Group was to ensure that the project timetable was maintained, to allow the researchers to discuss any issues regarding recruitment, emerging findings and dissemination of findings. A sentence has now been added to reflect this (P. 5 line 158-160)

“The advisory group ensured that the project timetable was maintained, any issues or problems regarding recruitment and emerging findings were discussed and resolved and appropriate dissemination of findings.”

Page 5 line 161 and following
This part is a mixture of true methods and a discussion of the value etc. of the chosen model. The latter part does typically belong to the discussion of the methodology in perspective of other alternatives and should give the advantages (and possible disadvantages) with the chosen model. This part of the manuscript should give an objective description of the methods chosen without any debate of its value. This should be given as suggested above.

Thank you. Discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen framework have now been move to Strengths and Limitations of the Discussion Section. (P. 17/18 line 601-609)

Page 6 line 201
Such statements as made here are typical elements of a discussion. The methods section should as the results just give an objective description of how things were performed and in such detail that the reader should be more or less able to repeat the study. Results should be given without interpretation, which should be left for the discussion of the outcome.

Thank you. This sentence has now been moved to the discussion section (P. 17 line 584-586)

Page 6 line 217-219
Ethics should be concentrated to one part of the manuscript (see above).

Thank you. This line has been deleted.

Page 7 line 243 (the box)
The text refers to 4Ps several times. Can the author focus that text and present the box or table at the first occasion. This should save duplicated text and immediately explain what 4 P is about.

Thank you. Box 1 is now presented earlier in the paper and reference is now made to Box 1 on P. 5, line 171 and duplicated text has been deleted.

Results
Results overall
The authors are suggested to separate the two parts of the investigation and present the data retrieved from the countries and presented in Tables 1-4 first and then the outcome of the interview part of the study.
The latter does now appear here and there but would be more easy to get an opinion of if presented in one block.

Thank you for this observation. Although the policy mapping exercise was conducted initially, comments made by interviewees served to corroborate or refute some of our findings. Furthermore, the interviews serve to provide context to the information presented in Tables 1-4. We would like to maintain the current format.

Page 8 line 251
There were 71 responders out of 71 approached. This is unusually good. Were more than 71 interview persons approached and what was the true response rate if not 100%?

Thank you. A sentence has been added stating the total number of experts and policy makers approached. (P. 8, line 257)

“We approached 120 experts for an interview, of which 71 agreed (response rate 59%).”

The distribution on different stakeholders seems uneven with many experts on food/nutrition and considerably less policy makers. Why? Does it influence the outcome in the meaning it may be skewed due to uneven distribution on the character of those asked?

Thank you. Considerable efforts were made to include as many policymakers as possible. However, we found on many occasions that they said they were too busy to take part, and also rather cautious about stating their personal views as opposed to their employing organisation.

A sentence has been added to the study limitations section to reflect this uneven distribution. (P. 17 line 593-595)

“Secondly, there was a disproportionate number of experts in food and nutrition interviewed. A number of additional policy makers were approached but declined, many stating that they were too busy to take part, or that they were unwilling to express their personal views.”

Page 8 line 259
Misspelling – should it not be qualitative?

Thank you for this observation! The spelling has been corrected.

Page 9 lines 291-305 (and elsewhere)
The reviewer is uncertain on the value of all these boxes. They may very well be given as appendixes. Then the text can present a focused description of the outcome of the interviews and as such it will be much more concentrated.

Thank you for this observation. We feel that the data is enriched and provides context to the mapping of food and nutrition policy actions. The comments provided are only a snapshot of responses. The full text can be found in Appendix 3.
Tables 1-4
Valuable information presented in a clear and informative way. The results text should only summarise the most important findings from the tables and this is already, with the above exceptions, done in a fair way.

Thank you.

Discussion
General
There is some overlap with repeated description of results in the discussion section. This should be avoided. The discussion is long and will benefit by some shortening. An example page 15 lines 495-508.

Thank you. The discussion has been savagely pruned from 1800 to 1180 words.

Page 15 lines 518-519
The statement may be correct but as far as the reviewer understands this has not been part of the present study. The authors should make sure that assumptions based on true observations are not stated in a way that one may get the impression it was truly supported by study data. Moreover references should be given in the standard way by numbers and not only as a certain number of reviews, modelling etc.).

Thank you. Reference to the Rapid Scoping Review has been deleted.

Conclusion
Rather long to be a conclusion but a good example on what a discussion of a study like this may look like rather than repetition of results.

Thank you. This has also been pruned.

Appendix 1 - 2
Probably not needed and they can be abbreviated and included in the methods section taking the recommendations already made by the reviewer into account.

Thank you. Appendix 1 has been deleted. We would quite like to preserve Appendix 2 please, because we feel that some readers may wish to see a more detailed version of the methodology used.

Appendix 3
This appendix is OK but may be supplemented by the interview replies presently given in the boxes in the results section.

Thank you. We agree that Appendix 3 has additional value. Some readers may find it useful and interesting to view the responses received from interview participants in more detail. However, we are quite happy to leave this to editorial decision.
Reviewer 2
Reviewer: Prof Ivan Perry

Reviewer's report:
Major compulsory revisions
The paper addresses an important and topical issue and the findings will inform public health nutrition policy.

Thank you

However the presentation of the work in the current format is unwieldy (42 pages of text, a series of chaotic tables and three lengthy appendices). In my view, it is unwise to present the findings from the policy mapping exercise, the policy interviews and the rapid scoping review in a single paper. It is arguable that each of these elements of the current paper merit a separate, short and well focused paper.

Thank you.

We have now completely removed the rapid scoping review from the current paper. The paper now concentrates on the policy mapping exercise, and interviews are demoted to mere supportive data (mainly in the Appendix). We would like to suggest that this major rebalancing has resulted in major improvements, as Reviewer 2 wished.

Furthermore, we would suggest that in this pruned revision, each component now serves to support the findings of the other. In particular the interviews serve to highlight the merits and weaknesses of current policy actions, and in particular offer insights into the implementation of each policy at grass-roots level (something which is impossible from a mapping exercise alone).

The authors should consider the use of a scoring system, ideally weighted, to summarize the findings from the mapping exercise.

Thank you, an arbitrary scoring system has been applied and included in Appendix 4. We would like to leave it to the Editor to then choose whether the new version is preferred, or whether the Tables 2-4 currently presented in the main text should be swopped with Appendix 4 Tables A2, A3 and A4.

The design of Tables 2-4 need further work

Thank you. As suggested, we have developed and applied a simple scoring system presented as Tables A2, A3 and A4 in Appendix 4.

The findings from the policy interviews are somewhat repetitive. They are well summarized in the paper and I am not sure that Appendix 3 is necessary. This material would also benefit from some reflection on the political and ideological barriers to the implementation of effective policies.

Thank you. We would beg to retain Appendix 3 as a web-based supplement. Feedback from colleagues trained in qualitative methodologies suggests that some readers might find it useful and interesting to view the responses
received from interview participants in more detail. Again, we would be happy to leave the final decision to the Editor.

I would also suggest dropping Appendix 1, the rapid scoping review

Thank you. Appendix 1 has been deleted

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests' below