Reviewer's report

Title: Public health research systems in the European Union

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Reviewer: Ilmo Keskimäki

Reviewer's report:

1. General comment
The authors have taken a very unthankful job when starting their review on public health research systems in EU. In order to strengthen and develop European public health research there is an obvious need for information produced in the study but considering variations in national research systems and difficulties to obtain the task has not been a simple one. The authors have succeeded relatively well. Due to its nature the work is highly descriptive but for those who need such information the end result, in particular with supplement detailed descriptions given on the Project’s web page, is very helpful. The manuscript is also well written and follows well the guidelines given on the Journal’s manuscripts.

2. The authors have used several methods to collect the data from the countries’ research system starting with the web sites of relevant ministries and funding agencies, ERAWATCH reviews on national research systems and cumulating the information with local informants. Considering the work done this is an appropriate way of collecting the information. However, I have a concern how complete and reliable the collected data on national research systems are. According to the manuscript the number of country informants who were supposed to check and validate the description of their own country varied considerably from country to country. While some informants may be poorly informed, this may lead to biased descriptions. For instance, public health researchers do not always know very well their countries’ overall research policy framework and may give an incomplete picture of it. This is a general challenge for this type of research but it would be helpful if these issues (reliability of the data, variations across the countries, further attempts to validate the data) were addressed in the manuscript.

To give an example regarding my own country: the manuscript claims that there is no national research strategy in Finland. That is probably not totally true. The Ministry of Education and Culture hosts the Research and Innovation Council (http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tiede/tutkimus-_ja_innovaationeuvosto/?lang=en) which is a high level body responsible for the strategic development and coordination of Finnish science and technology policy as well as of the national innovation system as a whole. The Council publishes biannually a strategic document on the government’s research and innovation policies. Unfortunately, many researchers are not familiar with the work of the Council. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has also recently (obviously after the data collection of
the study) issued (in Finnish) a strategic document on guidelines for research, development and innovation in social welfare and health care. These documents may not qualify to be considered as strategies.

3. Minor Essential Revisions

p 12, para 3;
- typing error: Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund

p 15, para 2;
- the name of the Estonian institute: correct name: National Institute for Health Development

p 18, para 2, last line;
- a typing error?: ... less than 4% 1% of the total...

p 23, para 2
- the name of the Finnish Institute > correct form: National Institute for Health and Welfare

4. Discretionary Revisions

p 16-17 and Table 1,
- The authors have included the Academy of Finland in the national Academies of Science. As recognised in the Table 1 its profile is different from other Academies. In 1970, the Finnish science policy structures were reformed and the Academy was established in its present form as a national research council. However, for some reason it retained the old name. The authors may want to consider adding a footnote on this. The authors may also want to consider if there are agencies with similar functions to those of Science Academies in Central Europe but which has renamed in their reforms.

**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.