



# Meta-evaluation of seven National Research Programmes 2017-2021

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## Road map ...

-  The National Research Programmes (NRPs)
-  The wider policy context
-  How the NRPs worked
-  Key results
-  Lessons for the future



## Programmes in scope

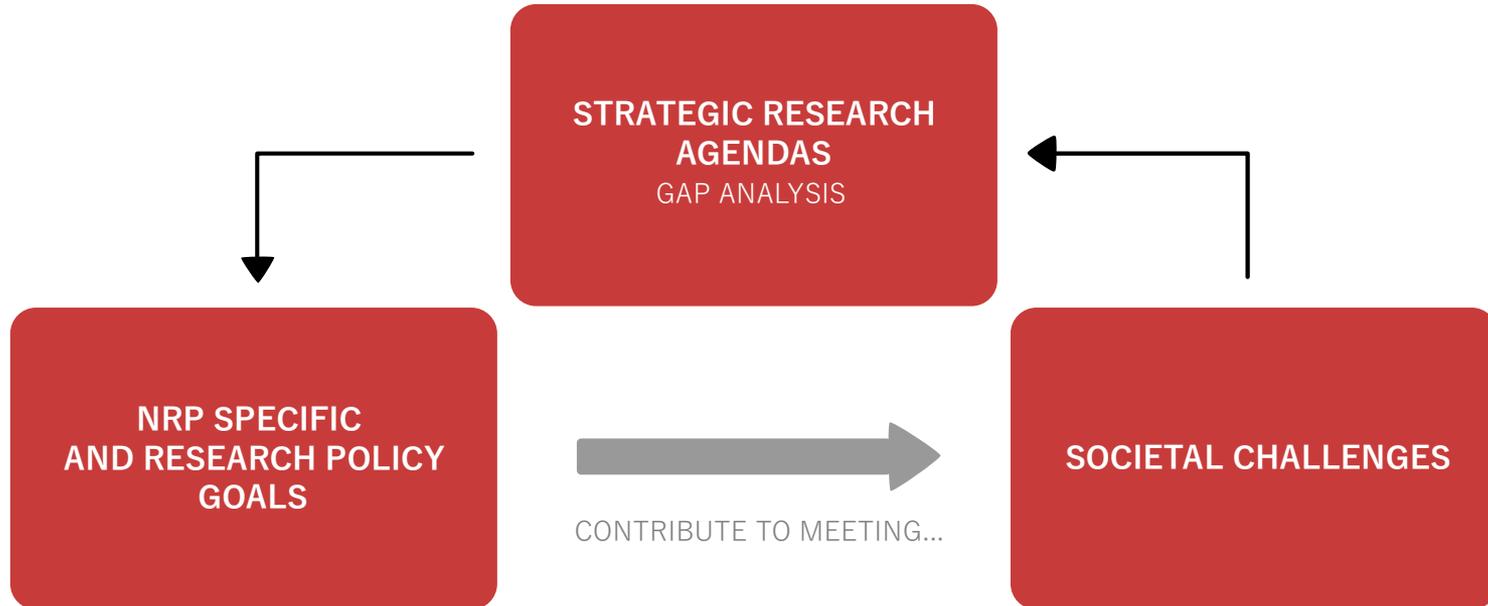
National Research Programmes	Responsible Ministry	Lead Funding Agency
Food	Enterprise and Innovation	Formas
Climate	Environment	Formas
Sustainable Spatial Planning	Environment	Formas
Working Life Research	Health and Social Affairs	Forte
Applied Welfare Research	Health and Social Affairs	Forte
Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)	Education and Research	Swedish Research Council
Migration and Integration	Education and Research	Swedish Research Council



## Goals

- ↗ Addressing societal challenges
  - ↗ Renewing knowledge and filling knowledge gaps to provide a relevant knowledge base for tackling societal challenges
  - ↗ Producing knowledge suited to tackling societal challenges, via interdisciplinary and cross-sector research, linking research to international agendas and taking steps to support the utilisation of research
  - ↗ Increasing cooperation and coordination among research funders in tackling societal challenges
- ↗ Achieving impact
  - ↗ On policy, industry, and civil society
  - ↗ On professional practice
- ↗ Addressing 'hygiene factors', relevant to all research production
  - ↗ Gender equality, links between research and higher education, dissemination, use of infrastructures, supporting utilisation, and participating in international research programmes and communities

## Intended systemic Role of the NRPs



# Evaluation questions

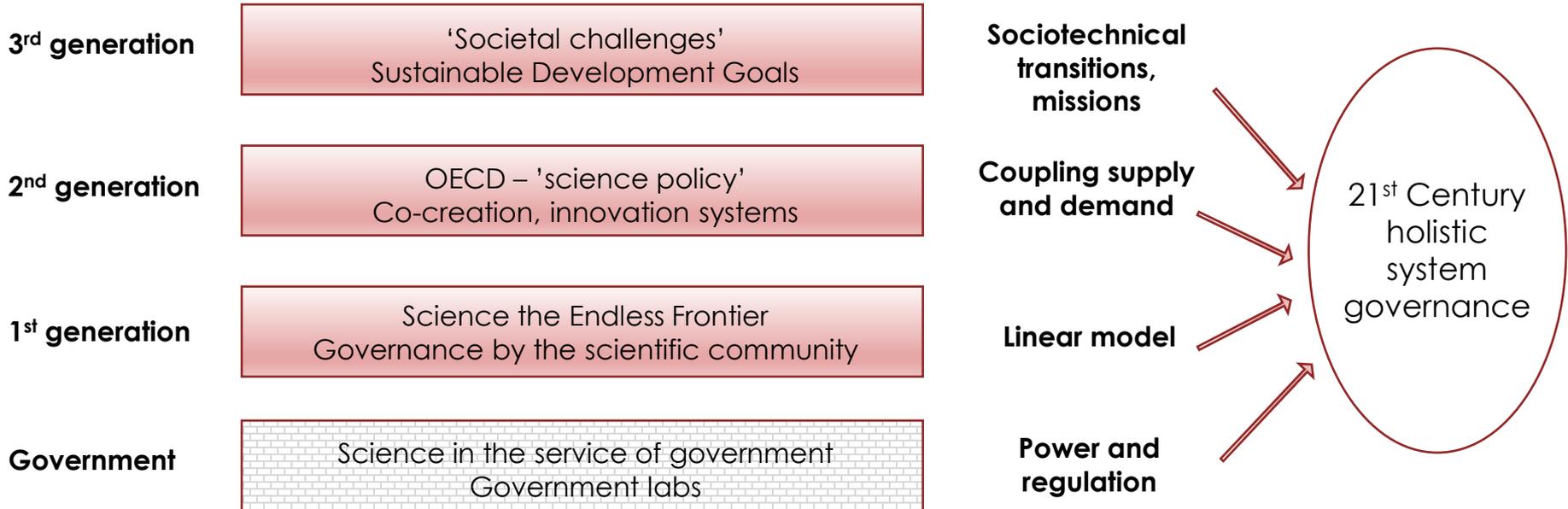
1. How do the NRPs address societal challenges?
2. What value do they add to the Swedish research and innovation system?



<b>NRP- level questions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Renewal and innovation							
Cooperation							
Utilisation							
Gender equality							
Efficiency							
Recommendations							

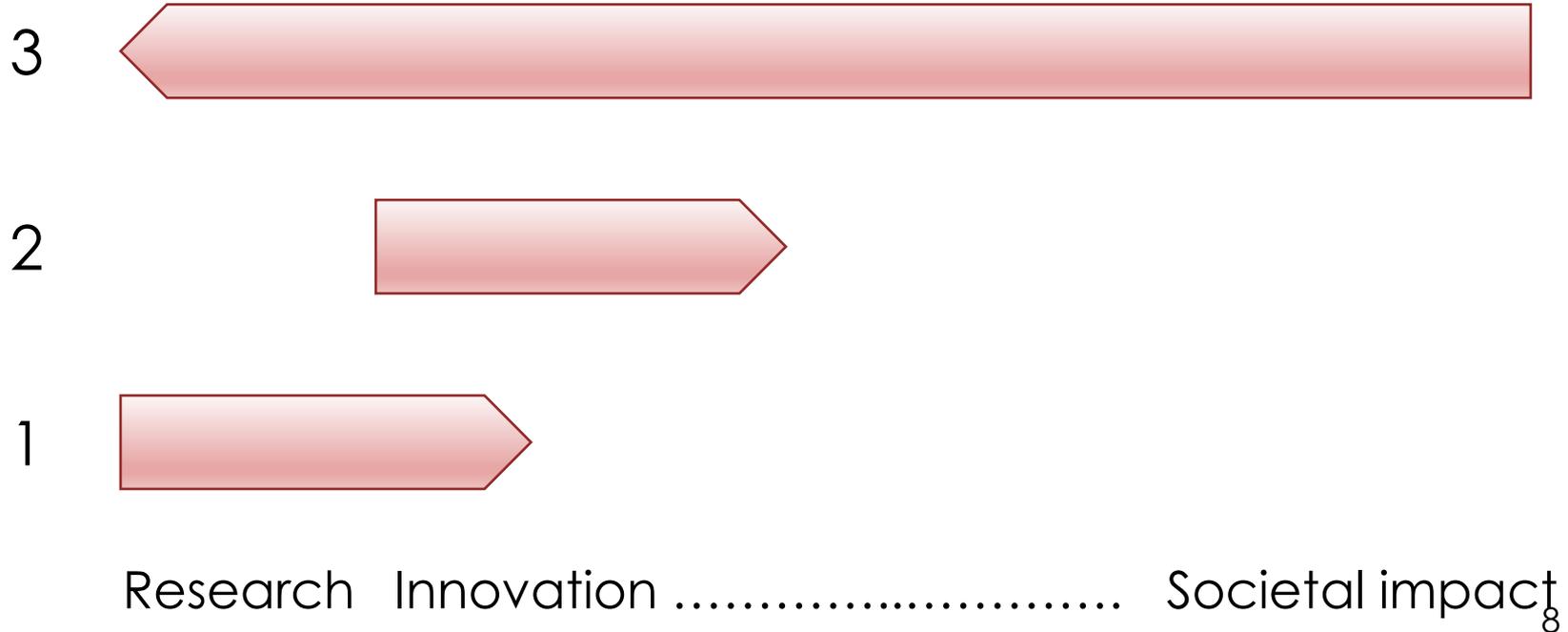


# The new policy challenge – integrating transitions into Research & Innovation governance



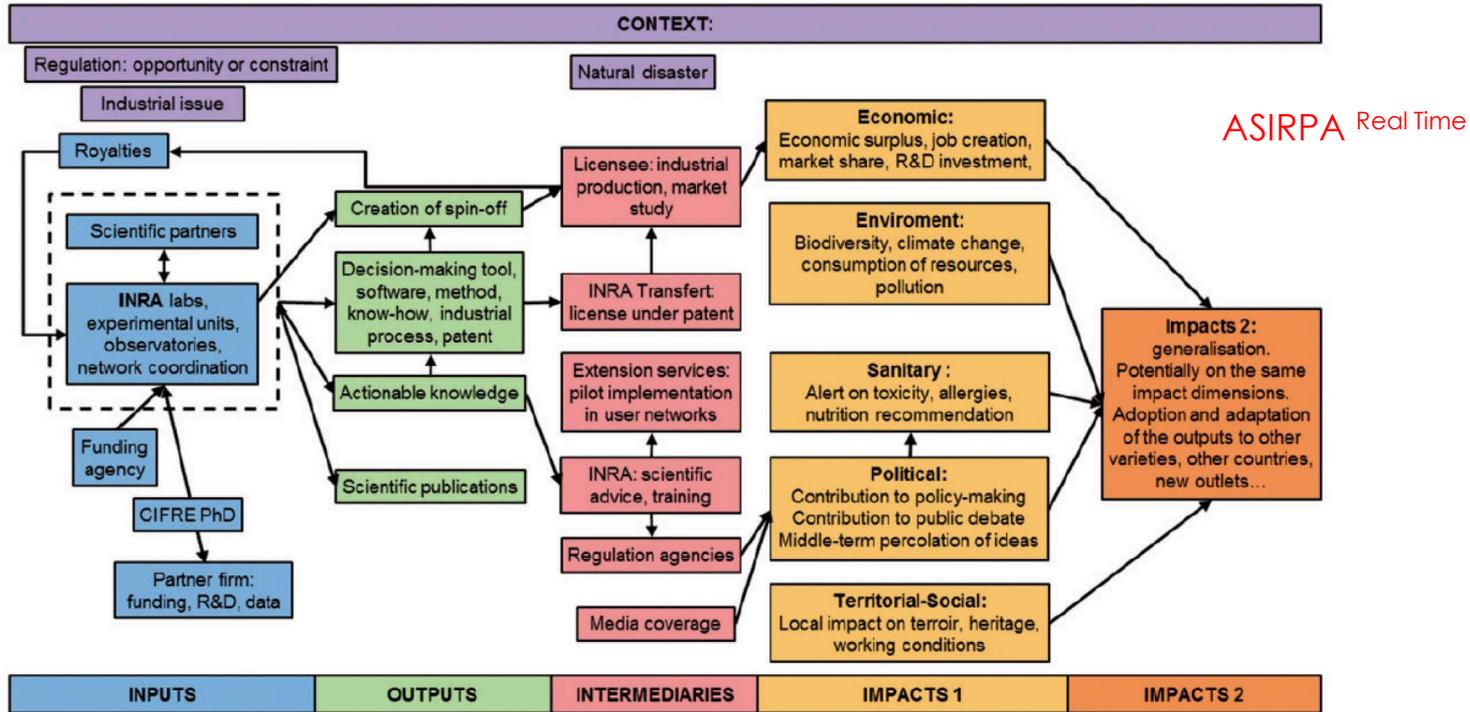


## Planning right to left, instead of left to right





# Easy to say ... harder to do





## Key characteristics of the NRPs

- Aimed to identify and fill knowledge gaps, to address societal challenges
- Run by three agencies with bottom-up funding traditions
- Big programme committees, aiming to include societal as well as research actors
  - Oversaw writing of research agendas
  - Influence declined during the programmes
- Implemented using traditional agency processes and funding instruments

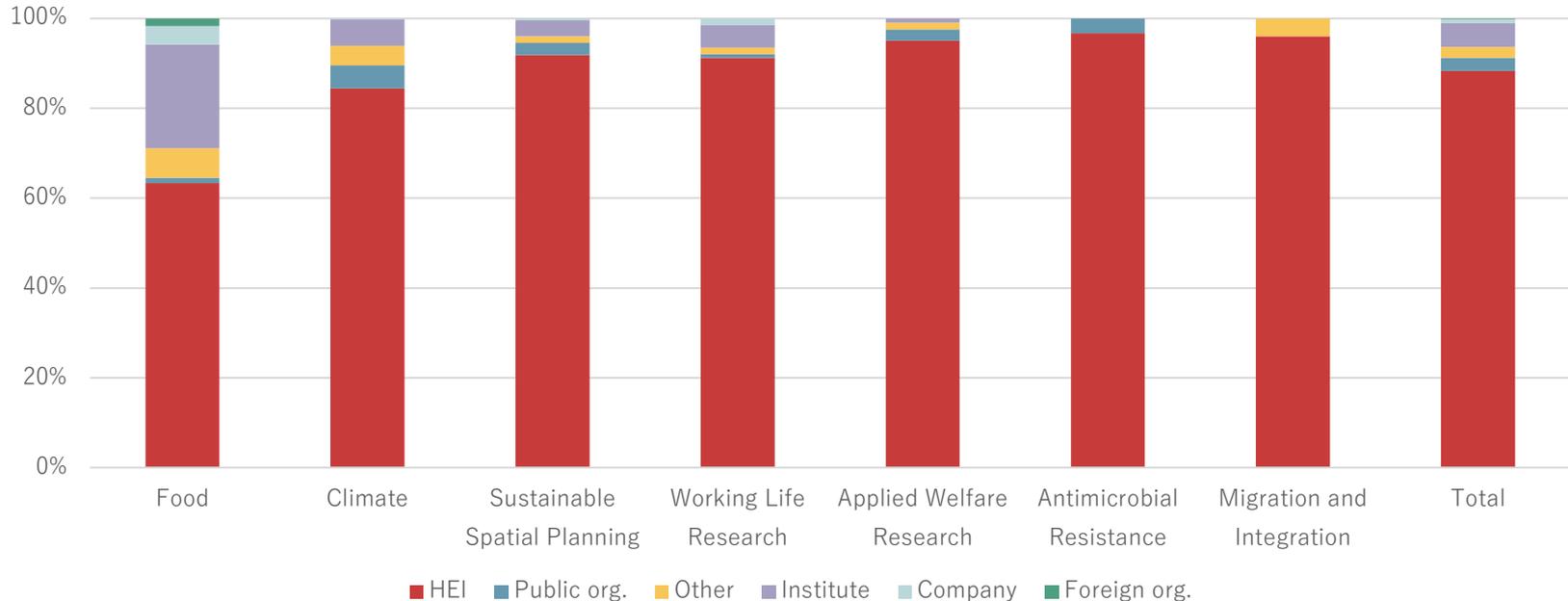


## The agencies have successfully established and funded the NRPs

- ↗ All NFPs set research agendas
  - ↗ The Climate agenda was radically changed in 2021
  - ↗ Another three agendas have had more minor modifications
- ↗ New funding arrangements and relationships set up in all three funders
- ↗ 660 projects quality-assured and funded during the evaluation period



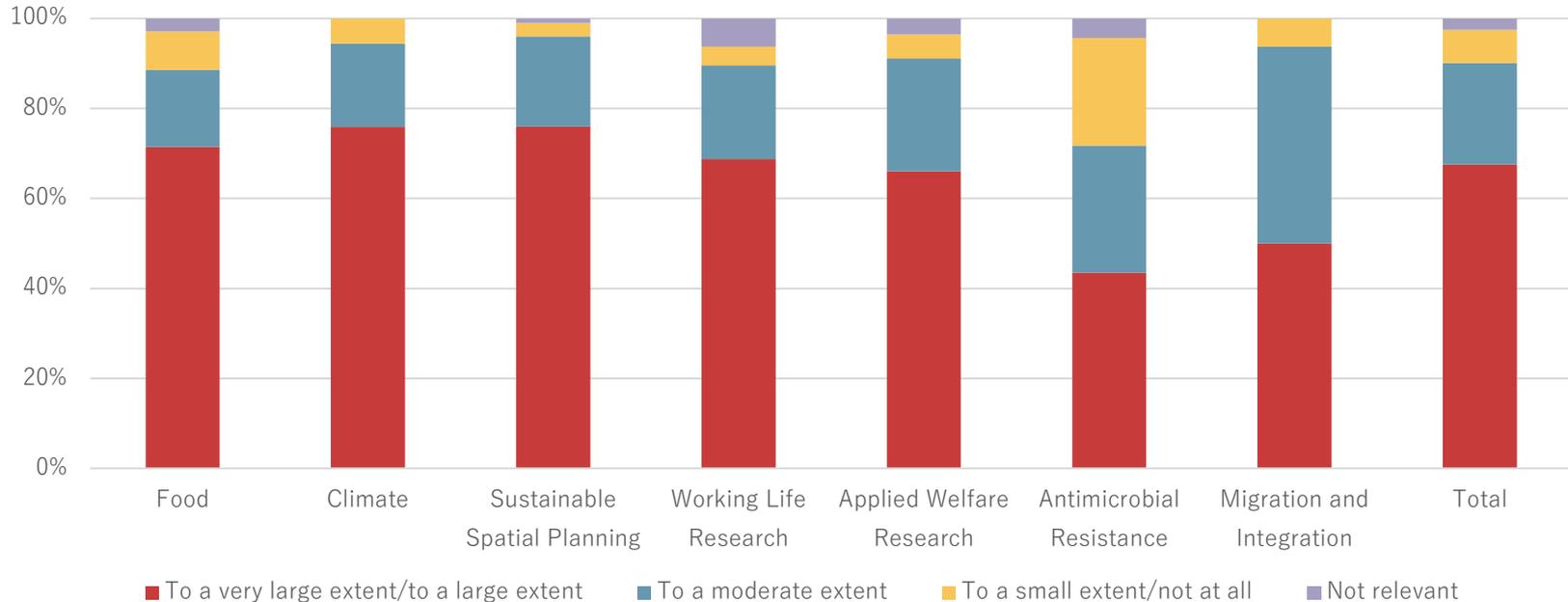
# Most of the money went to the higher education sector



Source: Data from the funding agencies



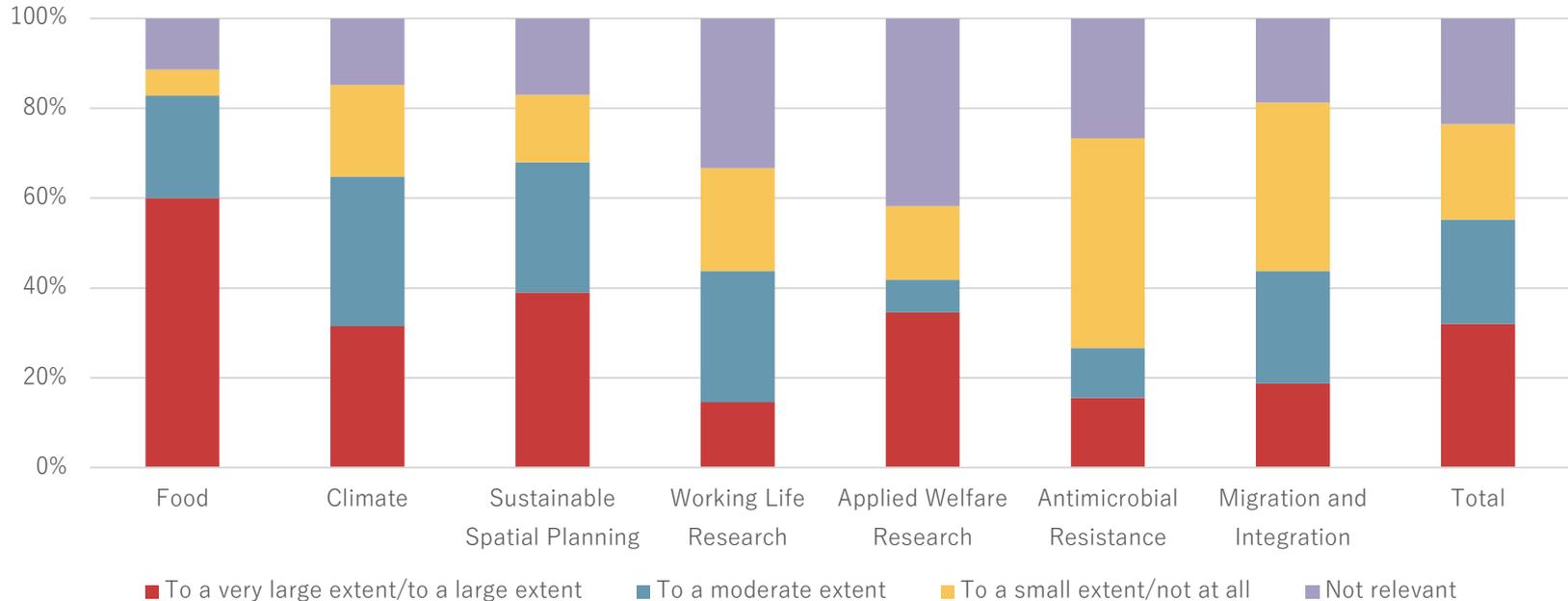
## A high degree of cross-disciplinary work



Source: Participant survey



# A more modest degree of cross-sector collaboration



Source: Participant survey

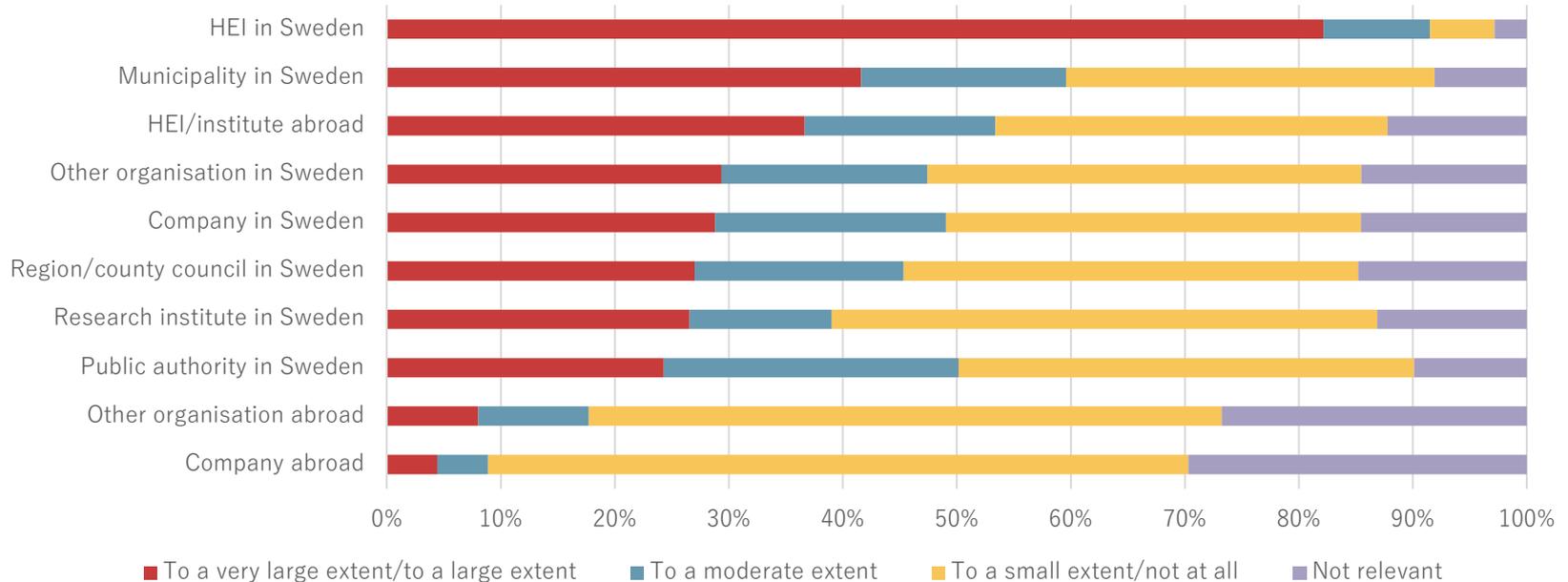


## Different cooperation patterns in different NRPs

- ↗ High in Food, Climate and Spatial Planning – much of it being informal
- ↗ Unsurprisingly, Working Life and Welfare tended to cooperate with the government sector
- ↗ AMR and Migration focused on research sector cooperation, and to some extent on government
  - ↗ Companies were absent from these – the Swedish Research Council is not allowed to fund them



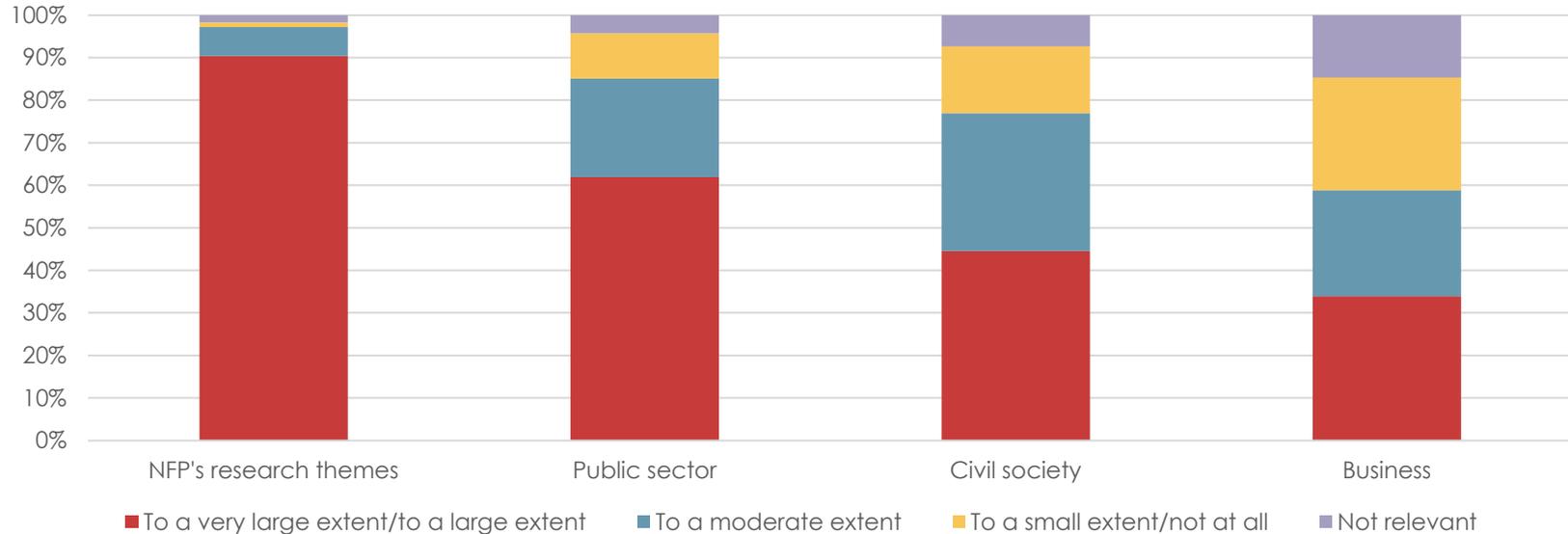
# Most cooperation was with other universities





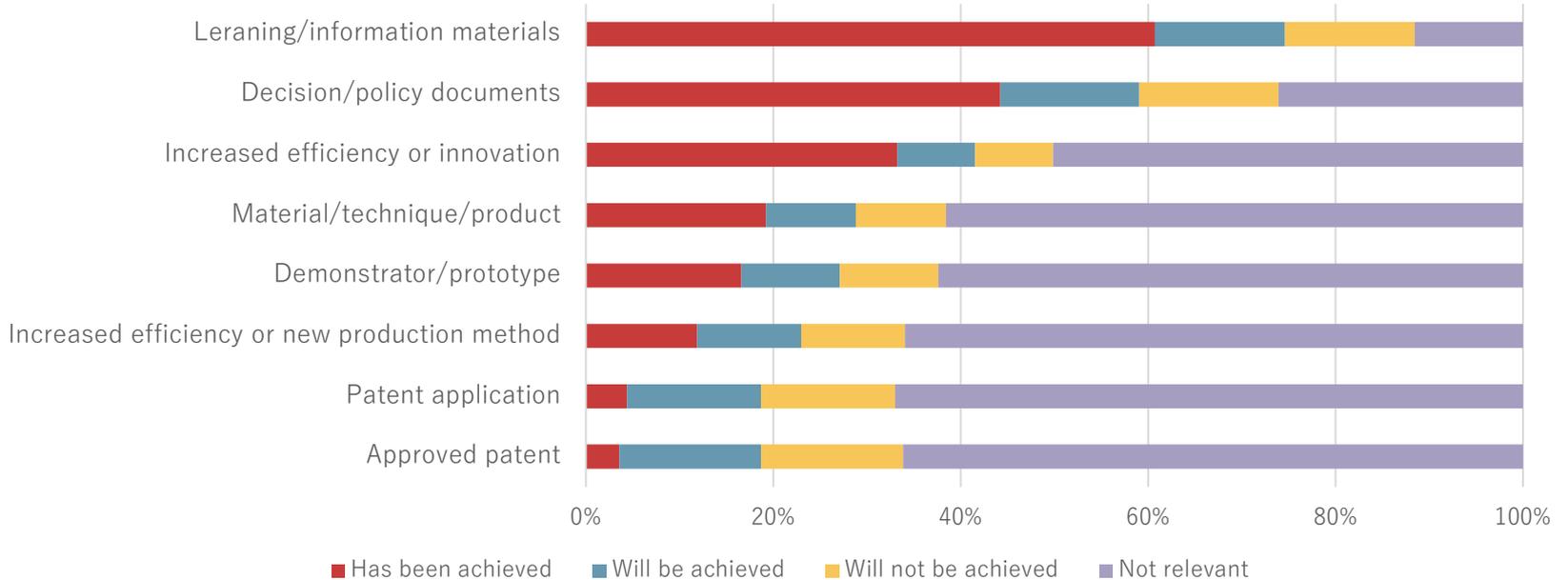
# Projects focus on new thinking and renewal within the research themes followed

Extent to which projects contribute to the needs of ...





# Outputs achieved and expected



Source: Participant survey



## Results

- ↗ PIs are optimistic about reaching research goals – but have only just started
- ↗ Almost all projects expect to close knowledge gaps
  - ↗ But peer reviewers point out that these are not always the gaps in the agendas
- ↗ Limited concern with exploiting knowledge results and few funding instruments available to support this
  - ↗ Food, Spatial Planning and Applied Welfare Research are more applied and have greater visible downstream effects

## Implementation

- ↗ The NRPs were well-implemented and effective, by the norms of traditional research policy
  - ↗ Though poor phasing of budget availability and planning impeded implementation
- ↗ The design approach reflects transitions theory, but implementation was hampered by organisational path dependencies and limited reflexivity
- ↗ Societal challenges addressed are mostly broad and ill-defined, hence agendas are fragmented and NRPs tend to fund incremental research
- ↗ NRPs demonstrated inter-agency cooperation and acted as platforms in their own areas, but there is no evident wider strategy or coordination across major Swedish funding programmes, eg SRAs, SIPs, cooperation programmes



## **NRPs overloaded with ‘hygiene factor’ goals, that belong at organisational, not programme, level**

- ❏ Gender equality – not handled, but not worsened, by NRPs
- ❏ International participation – supported by some NRPs (especially AMR) – but real science is in any case global science
- ❏ Societal impact – disappointing to date in all seven cases
- ❏ Research-based teaching – generally done in Sweden, but is under the control of the universities not the funders
- ❏ Use of infrastructure – no evidence from the individual evaluations



## Some immediate implications

- Take account of path dependencies when choosing implementation agencies organisations
- Modify their standing orders, where necessary
- Develop their within the agencies to work with societal challenges
- Improve the availability and use of funding and other instruments to link NRPs to needs for and use of research
- Ensure that programme committees have stronger and more permanent roles, including end-users and implementers
- Embed reflexivity more firmly in programme management
- Set generic goals that apply to all research at the organisational, not the programme, level



## Wider lessons

- ↗ All three ‘generations’ are needed to produce holistic policy for research and innovation
- ↗ Priorities for tackling societal challenges need to be set at national level
  - ↗ Deciding which to address ‘at scale’ and in which to maintain a lower scale of ‘readiness’
- ↗ Funders and beneficiaries need to think in new ways to handle societal challenges
- ↗ Less fragmented arrangements are needed for societal challenges
- ↗ Universities could benefit more from NRPs and other large-scale funding instruments if they adopted more specific strategies



# Thank you.

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