Policy Alternatives Research Institute

Today, accelerating social transformations have given rise to new problems and complex new challenges. In such an environment, there is a pressing need for contributors to the formation of public policy to adapt to the times. Policy formation fully utilizing the results of advanced research is now a prerequisite to the resolution of the various problems that face society.

Faculty members of the University of Tokyo have over many years made significant contributions in the policy making process, in particular through their participation in various advisory bodies to the government. With universities expected to make a social contribution, however, one of the responsibilities of the University of Tokyo as a “national university corporation” should be to provide intellectual resources for policy formation and offer policy options.

For this reason, the Policy Alternatives Research Institute was established as a think-tank organization, a body intended to transmit the University’s wealth of accumulated knowledge to society at large.
Mission of the Policy Alternatives Research Institute

— Finding Solutions: Contributing to Problem Solving and Supplying Feedback to Academic research

Ichiro Sakata
Director, Policy Alternatives Research Institute

Today, we see a growing potential in the explosive growth in specifically targeted academic research. However, the number of cases where such challenges can be met using the principles of a single scientific discipline is relatively small. For this reason, we need mechanisms in place that will allow us to design solutions that combine diverse areas of scientific knowledge.

The Policy Alternatives Research Institute (PARI) aims to make recommendations and statements on a range of policy alternatives for real-world problem solving. Capitalizing on the advantages offered by the University of Tokyo as a comprehensive university, we create forums for multidisciplinary communication as well as combine research outcomes in various departments and disciplines.

With five key research areas and a diverse mix of personnel, including PARI’s researchers and staff, cooperating university faculty researchers, and invited researchers, we are advancing our activities while linking our interdisciplinary research with society. Designing our research to identify specific challenges that require resolution, the institute has been proposing policy options in the form of “Policy Recommendations” along with data, evidence and papers acquired through our research.

In the future, we also hope to emphasize our role in providing individual academic research projects with constructive feedback from field-based problem solving and to further expand and enrich the scope of our networks.

Conceptualizing Next Generation Social Systems Based on Knowledge Collaboration

— Expectations for the Policy Alternatives Research Institute

Makoto Gonokami
President, the University of Tokyo

The 20th century witnessed dramatic development across all disciplines of the natural sciences, becoming a period of wide-ranging technological advancement. These scientific and technological innovations tremendously expanded the scope of human activities, transformed society, and granted humans unprecedented powers.

Even so, the limitations of the basic systems supporting modern society, such as capitalism and democracy, have become obvious. I feel that the world situation is becoming increasingly unstable because of the manifestation of global-scale problems, including the degradation of the global environment, depletion of natural resources and regional disparities. For humanity today, which has acquired greater capabilities than all preceding generations, the path to creating a stable and peaceful society is still unclear. With these circumstances in mind, I believe that we need to create a new system that encourages people from diverse backgrounds to respect one another and cooperate so that they can give a substantial boost to the global economy. Nothing but human wisdom can put this new system into action. In other words, what I have just described is a society in which wisdom drives the economy. I believe that humanity is now at a crossroads, forced to choose whether or not a shift towards this kind of wisdom-driven society is possible. As a developed country in Asia, I believe that Japan has a historical obligation to lead humanity’s shift towards a wisdom-driven society, and that the University of Tokyo should make significant contributions.

It is my desire that the Policy Alternatives Research Institute shall play a role in conceptualizing the next generation mechanisms to supplant the limited mechanisms of contemporary society mentioned above, and in disseminating this to the world. In order to achieve this, it is essential to conduct knowledge collaboration, drawing together a diversity of knowledge with a global perspective. By further combining the academic knowledge held by the various organizations and disciplines across all faculties of the University of Tokyo, and by forging deeper cooperative relationships with foreign research institutions and the front lines where issues are resolved, it is my hope that this institute develops into a domestic and international network “hub” where people with a diversity of knowledge can coalesce.
Roles and Activities of the Institute

Communicating policy alternatives utilizing research results at the University of Tokyo

We both present policy proposals ourselves and draw ideas from various research results arising in different departments of the university in order to disseminate them to society as policy alternatives.

Detecting problems by constructing networks covering a wide range of fields

Taking advantage of being a part of a university which has diverse research interests, we try to detect problems and look for comprehensive solutions which could not be found by research done in any single discipline, by constructing networks covering a wide range of fields.

Activating policy research by interacting with internal and external organizations

In order to facilitate multidisciplinary and multilateral research, we form networks with the government, companies, mass media, NPOs, and other organizations, as well as with departments inside the university, and try to activate mutual exchanges and policy research initiatives.

Methodology of Policy Research and Recommendations

We call a unit which conducts policy research a “policy research unit” and a unit which conducts concrete social demonstration research a “research demonstration project”. Policy recommendations based on research results are published under the name of the policy research unit or the research demonstration project.

Researches at the Policy Alternatives Research Institute are organized by projects ongoing here, such as existing funded research or corporate sponsored research programs in our various departments. In addition to these, independent policy research units or research demonstration projects may be launched by the institute on important issues which, from the researcher’s viewpoint, could potentially arise in the future, even if such issues are not presently socially recognized.

As a general rule, research undertaken by each policy research unit and policy recommendations based on the results of that research are conducted under the name of the unit or its director.

When we propose policy recommendations, we make it a principle to indicate multiple possibilities and provide information which would aid actual policy making, showing clearly both advantages and disadvantages based on objective data.

Policy Recommendations (notable examples)

Science and Technology Policy and Global Research Universities in Singapore: Implications for Japan
— KAKENHI & PARI (March 2015)

Final Report - Resilient Governance Study
— PARI & COCN (March 2014)

University Reform from the Viewpoint of Innovation System: Evaluation of a National University 10 years after its Incorporation
— University and Society Policy Research Unit (December 2013)

Recommendations for the Review of the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy
— UT Ocean Alliance & PARI (September 2012)

Final Report – The Silver New Deal for our Active Aging Society
— PARI & COCN (March 2012)

Options for Institutionalizing Technology Assessment in Japan
— Technology Governance Policy Research Unit (December 2010)

The Future of Asian Security
— IGCC, Yonsei University & Northeast Asian Security Policy Research Unit (PARI) (December 2010)

Energy and Environmental Policies for our Society
— Technology Governance Policy Research Unit (July 2009)
PARI-ERIA Energy Research

In response to an agreement toward an Energy Efficiency Roadmap for East Asia concluded at the Fourth EAS Energy Ministers Meeting held in Viet Nam in July 2010, PARI started to work on scenarios and policy recommendations on energy policy for individual East Asian countries in collaboration with the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA).

For East Asian countries, PARI draws up scenarios of economic and social development to create an energy roadmap, including in the field of energy efficiency. In line with the roadmap, PARI provides an economic and social assessment of energy technology and policies. For the first two years, PARI focused on Lao PDR. The roadmap of Lao PDR aimed to achieve energy efficiency, in particular by reducing energy loss during electricity transmission and distribution. In response to a request by the Lao government, PARI continued to work on the roadmap from the demand side perspective.

Based on the above experience in Laos, in 2013 PARI began research on Myanmar with a view to formulating an integrated energy policy with improved energy electricity access, particularly in rural areas, with the specific aim of improving the electrification rate in the country. In this research, PARI aims to cover off-grid areas, including border areas, and has been implementing the following methodologies: fieldwork, electricity demand forecasting, mini-grid development simulation and analysis of Thai actors. PARI also studies good practice in rural electrification in other ASEAN countries. From the same year, we have been conducting collaborative research with the Energy Research Institute (ERI) of Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, which aims to determine how to take advantage of the economic dynamism of the neighboring countries such as Thailand to supply more electricity to rural areas in Myanmar, particularly the border areas.

Global Energy Policy and East Asia Research Unit http://pari.u-tokyo.ac.jp/eng/unit/gepea.html
Six Key Research Areas

Currently, we have six key research areas, under which we classify policy research units and research demonstration projects.

1. Universities and Social Systems
   Established to study methods of knowledge management at universities with especial focus on specifics such as intellectual property, security export control, organizational management and human resource development.

2. Innovation Systems
   Established to adapt to new innovation environments, and study systems to promote innovation from a multifaceted perspective, covering economy, technology, society and other related fields.

3. Technology and Risk Governance
   Established to organize a wide range of expertise and knowledge obtained through extensive practice to deal comprehensively with risks and policy issues in technology utilization, natural disasters, financial markets, energy, space activities, etc., and study mechanisms for social decision-making and policy instruments.

4. Security Studies
   Established to conduct cross-national research on the future of national security from various angles, covering foods, energy, economy, and human interaction, as well as military power.

5. Institutions for an Aging Society and Medical Innovations
   Established to make a comparative review of various policy instruments in many policy areas to deal with the aging of society, assess the impact of medical innovation and study the future of comprehensive policy measures and systems.

6. Collaboration Research/Sponsored Research