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A Taxonomy of Stakeholders in Legal Research Communication

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Abstract: This paper presents a comprehensive taxonomy of stakeholders in legal research communication, shedding light on the diverse roles they play in the dissemination of legal research and knowledge. Stakeholders are categorized into four distinct groups – (1) legal research producers, (2) enablers, (3) policy and judicial decision-makers and (4) recipients and implementers. The methodology employed involves a comprehensive literature review and direct observation, since the authors are legal researchers engaged in legal research communication. By emphasizing the theoretical underpinnings of stakeholders' involvement in legal research communication, this research aims to enrich the understanding of the dynamics that underlie effective knowledge dissemination in the field of legal studies. Through this taxonomy, legal scholars, social science scholars and practitioners can gain deeper insights into how to engage and collaborate with stakeholders to enhance the dissemination and societal relevance of legal research.

Keywords: Legal research communication; Science communication; Stakeholders; Taxonomy of Stakeholders.

Basic ideas:

- Effective communication is an essential prerequisite for legal research to be deemed responsible and meaningful for the broader society, therefore legal researchers must challenge themselves to communicate in accessible and appropriate language considering the level of literacy of their stakeholders.
- Stakeholders engaged in legal research can be classified into four clear categories: (1) legal research producers, (2) enablers, (3) policy and judicial decision-makers and (4) recipients and implementers.

Recognizing these groups can streamline the planning of legal research communication strategies. Since the conception of the investigation plan, the researcher must identify those potentially interested or involved in the research. Thus, a strategic communication plan targeted and with appropriate language for the identified stakeholders will be provided together with the research itself.

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) is set to allocate approximately 95 billion euros from 2021 to 2027 for research projects including social sciences and legal studies under the *Horizon Europe* program. This aims to promote scientific innovation and facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and innovation (European Commission [EC], 2024b). Within this framework, proposals must include a well-thought-out communication plan. The Model Grant Agreement spells out explicit obligations concerning scientific communication and dissemination (EC, 2024a, p. 43-44), with potential implications for fund allocation (EC, 2024a, p. 65-71). Consequently, researchers, including those in the legal field, must formulate a science communication strategy to secure funding and increase the research impact.

The guidelines of European Commission (EC) within the *European Research Area* program emphasizes the relevance of science communication in driving societal transformation (EC, 2020, p. 18). The *Responsible Research and Innovation* (RRI) approach asserts that science communication is essential for cultivating public engagement and ensuring the governance of responsible research (Expert Group on Policy Indicators of RRI, 2015, p. 18-25). Hence, the EU places significant emphasis on the researchers' responsibility to communicate their scientific discoveries to sponsors, funding partners, peers and audiences like policymakers, and society.

The significance of effective communication in legal research becomes even more pronounced. Law is a comprehensive discipline that encompasses a wide spectrum of societal aspects, addressing the private sphere, in matters such as family relations and contractual agreements, and the public sphere, addressing issues like state organization, regulatory frameworks, and scientific progress itself. For instance, within the EU, research involving clinical data falls under the purview of Directive 2001/20/EC, underscoring the influential role of legal research in impacting public policies (Cairney & Oliver, 2018) designed to address societal interests across diverse domains.

However, several challenges traditionally hinder the effective communication of legal research. The first is the use of legal language, which is perceived as inaccessible to a substantial portion of the public (Tiersma, 1999, p. 87-114). The technical jargon acts as a barrier to effective communication of legal research (Bucchi & Trench, 2014; Intemann, 2023, p. 357). The second challenge pertains to legal literacy (White, 1983; Yadav & Yadav, 2021, p. 48). Despite the increased availability of various legal documents made possible by the internet, a significant portion of the public still lacks fundamental legal literacy. This exacerbates the challenge of bridging the gap between legal researchers and the broader audience. A third challenge relates to the focus of legal researchers, who frequently direct their attention towards their peers within the legal field (peer-to-peer communication) rather than society (citizen science) (Delfanti, 2010). This preference is often driven by the inclination of legal researchers toward the practical application of their work in legal proceedings and court rulings, as opposed to the broader impact on public policies.

A fourth crucial aspect is that, in the legal field, communication skills have traditionally centred on writing and public speaking (Gallacher, 2015). Paradoxically, even though communication is an indispensable tool in the routine of legal professionals – whether in courts or drafting legal

documents – legal researchers often lack the skills to employ common communication techniques in relation to legal research. Methods such as press releases, infographics, and other innovative formats like theatre are frequently unknown by legal researchers (Baram-Tsabari & Lewenstein, 2017; Cooke et al., 2017; Sánchez-Mora, 2016). Hence, the legal research communication is an area of paramount practical importance.

There exists a notable scientific gap within this field. While some studies have delved into related topics such as visual law (Brunschwig, 2014), legal design (Hagan, 2020), and legal communication (Buchanan et al., 1978), as well as movements like Law and Literature (Linhares, 2013) and Law and Cinema (Machura, 2016), the specific domain of legal research communication remains relatively unexplored. A search on the Scopus platform yielded only four studies featuring the term "legal science communication". Among these, one places the legal discourse as an instance of science within the boundaries of the legal discipline (Tiililä, 2018). The second explores semiotics within legal theology (Héritier, 2021). The third examines legislation as one facet of multidisciplinary scientific communication (Plaza, 2015). Notably, only one study focuses on the communication of legal research, being dedicated to the open access issue (Aguado-Lopez & Becerril-García, 2022). Thus, this research is underscored by both its practical need and the scientific void.

The primary objective of this paper is to present a taxonomy of stakeholders involved in legal research communication. Methodologically this study relies on traditional literature review (Hart, 2007, p. 20) and participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989), leveraging the authors' experience in communicating and assessing the impact of legal research. To attain this goal, section one introduces the concept of *Responsible Legal Research and Innovation* (RLRI) and its relationship with science communication and engagement of stakeholders. Section two offers an overview of the scope of legal studies. Section three is about science communication and legal research. Section four shows the role of stakeholders in the legal research communication. This approach lays the foundation for presenting the taxonomy of stakeholders involved in legal research. Then, final remarks summarize the key points of this research.

1. The Responsible Legal Research and Innovation (RLRI)

Since the 2010s, the EC has actively advocated for the integration of the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) policy in its programs, focusing on the development of meaningful research and innovation aligned with societal needs (Wittrock et al., 2021).

The origins of RRI can be traced back to research programs within the life sciences. It emerged in the 1990s simultaneously in Europe and in the United States (Felt, 2018, p. 108). In Europe, The ELSA (Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects) program, funded by the EC between 1994 and 1998 (EC, 2014a) served as a source of inspiration for RRI. In the United States, ELSI (Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications), led by the National Human Genome Research Institute, played an equivalent role (Dolan et al., 2022, p. 1).

Despite criticism from social science and humanities (SSH) researchers (Felt, 2018, p. 108), the relevance of this approach has been on the rise. The Lund Declaration embraced RRI by

emphasizing the need to combine the demands of the supply and demand sides to support business development and public policy goals which addresses "grand challenges" of the global society (Swedish EU Presidency, 2009, p. 1). In 2010, the Council of the EU also underscored the importance of a societal focus in the European research (Council of the European Union, 2010). Building on this foundation, the proposal for establishing the *2014-2020 Horizon Europe Programme*, released in 2011, explicitly integrated the RRI agenda (EC, 2011). In 2014, the Rome Declaration on RRI called upon a wide range of stakeholders to proactively address this topic (EC, 2014b). At this stage, "the concept had to be sufficiently vague to allow for broad adherence while remaining concrete enough to utilize it as a reasonably well-functioning device for policymaking and research practice" (Felt, 2018, p. 110).

The adoption of European RRI guidelines in the legal field, under the banner of *Responsible Legal Research and Innovation* (RLRI), has been spearheaded by a collaboration between Portuguese – University of Coimbra Institute for Legal Research (UCILeR) – and French institutions – Chaire Normandie pour la Paix at the University of Caen (Santos, 2024b, p. 30).

In practical terms, RLRI is a procedural approach with two primary facets applicable to legal research: outcome and process. The first involves seeking solutions to pertinent issues. Opting for a research topic that corresponds to one of the seventeen sustainable development goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda (Aragão, 2021a; Nylund et al., 2022) is highly beneficial, given its global significance.

The second refers to the procedural aspects of research, encompassing aspects like transparency (Owen, 2019, p. X), accountability (Grunwald, 2016, p. 34) and interdisciplinarity (Gjefsen & Vie, 2021). These aspects are encapsulated in the well-established EU framework for RRI, which extends to legal research including: (1) public engagement, (2) gender equality, (3) science education, (4) open access, ethics, and (6) governance (EC, 2015, p. 10).

Science communication is pivotal to this framework. Communication is a critical component to public engagement, fostering public understanding, and facilitating active participation in scientific advancements (EC, 2015, p. 21-22). This signifies a shifting from mere literacy to active engagement and participation. The public becomes a peer in the process of generating academic knowledge – the citizen science (EC, 2015, p. 21), which addresses their "needs and concerns" as the citizens are active in the creation and development of the scientific knowledge (Irwin, 1995). It should be noted that "citizen science is not just a participatory way to contribute to scientific knowledge, but also an effective way to address a wide collection of societal challenges" (Vohland et al., 2021, p. 7). Another aspect is science education, which nurtures scientific interest in the public, especially among youth (EC, 2015, p. 28).

These perspectives underscore the integral role of stakeholders within the RLRI framework. A survey at the Faculty of Law, University of Coimbra in 2021 revealed that nearly 80% of legal researchers are committed to ensuring the accessibility of their research to stakeholders, employing methods such as journal publication (46.7%), articles on websites (40%), and newspapers (40%), along with social media (20%) (Aragão, 2021b, p. 5-7). They actively involve stakeholders through workshops (44.4%) and conferences (33.3%), promoting publications in

plain language (35.6%), and disseminating audiovisual content (31.1%). They also acknowledged the relevance of surveys, interviews, "World Cafes," focus groups, and free publications to make legal science more responsible.

2. An overview of legal studies and legal research

Some argue legal research is encompassed by social sciences (OECD, 2015, p. 74-75), but it often lacks the empirical and evidence-based approach (Siems & Síthigh, 2012) that is commonplace in those fields (Gerring, 2012, p. 1-2). This makes legal research closer to humanities (Chynoweth, 2008, p. 32). Consequently, legal research is occasionally perceived as "not truly academic" (Chynoweth, 2008, p. 28). This stems from the theoretical nature inherent in legal research, often delving into philosophical inquiries regarding the law itself. Legal research is oriented toward discerning the normative legal meaning of a legal source to derive a legal criterion from it (a normative criterion of law) (Castanheira Neves, 2011, p. 207-213). Such studies serve the practical needs of legal practitioners and judges, who are more concerned with legal doctrines that establish norms applicable in specific situations (Hutchinson & Duncan, 2012). Law scholars, especially those of the common law tradition are usually more concerned with "what the courts will do and nothing else" (Dworkin, 1973, p. 53). Grounded in the study of legal texts, this strongly normative model is known as blackletter legal research (Chynoweth, 2008, p. 29; Lammasniemi, 2018, p. 69).

A typical research question for legal scholars is "what is the law" revolving around legal rules, which are inherently normative. Their "laboratory is the law library", where they will look for "connections between one set of doctrines and another, to see what order can be made within the rich but nevertheless insulated world of precedents and statutes" (Dworkin, 1973, p. 53-54). Conversely, social researchers seek answers to questions involving causal relationships among variables, necessitating empirical methods (Chynoweth, 2008, p. 29). This distinction sometimes leads to the denial of scientific status to legal studies. Consequently, the authors of this paper prefer to refer to the "science communication" of legal research simply as "communication of legal research." This choice is made to prevent controversies that could overshadow the vital significance of this field.

The pure doctrinal approach traditionally dominates legal research, characterized by deductive reasoning (Chynoweth, 2008, p. 32). In such cases, legal scholars focus on hypothetical scenarios, whereas practising lawyers and judges address real situations (Chynoweth, 2008, p. 32). Especially hard cases often employ techniques like analogical reasoning, which examines a particular case by drawing inferences from similar cases, as well as inductive reasoning, which moves from specific cases to establish a general rule, and policy judgments, which use foundational legal principles (Chynoweth, 2008, p. 33-34).

On the opposite side lies legal applied research, which emphasizes the application of law in specific contexts (Chynoweth, 2008, p. 29). This usually demands social science methods, which are commonly associated with the empirical legal research movement (Cane & Kritzer, 2010) or

socio-legal studies (Creutzfeldt et al., 2020, p. 3). An increasing number of legal researchers have advocated legal reforms or have contributed to academic knowledge by drawing qualitative and quantitative observations from the real world (Epstein & King, 2002, p. 2). For instance, the *Chaire Normandie pour la Paix* develops research areas such as legal indicators and climate justice, which have a strong empirical dimension grounded in social sciences methods (Maison de la Recherche en Sciences Humaines, 2022).

Despite facing criticism (Tamanaha, 1999) and resistance from jurists who defends the strict doctrinal legal method (Roux, 2014, p. 17-19), applied legal research is increasingly embraced. Different from pure doctrinal research, which primarily leads to peer-to-peer communication, applied legal research is often influential in shaping policies that affect society, relying on effective communication to achieve its objectives. Therefore, legal researchers from all backgrounds should be encouraged to disseminate the outcomes of their research to society.

3. Communication of legal research

Access to scientific knowledge by scientists and non-scientists, and the understanding of how to better utilize its benefits, is defined as "science literacy" (Shen, 1975, p. 265). Shen (1975) identifies three forms of science literacy: the "practical", which is considered the most urgent and neglected, contributing to solve problems and raise living standards; the "civic", which aims to empower citizens in democracies; and the "cultural", which is motivated by human desire and curiosity towards science. Each type of literacy must have its communication strategy according to its context, including an "ordinary-language science" clear to the layman (Shen, 1975, p. 268).

In the 17th century, William Gilbert, renowned for his discovery of Earth's magnetism lamented that when conveying his findings to the general public, he felt like a "babbling hag" (as quoted by Einsiedel, 2008, p. 173). This portrayal reflects the top-down approaches that historically dominated the communication of science. However, a dialogical model has now taken precedence in this field, marking a point of no return (Bucchi & Trench, 2016, p. 157). "Public engagement" has evolved into a fundamental mindset for stakeholders in the knowledge ecosystem (Bucchi & Trench, 2016, p. 157).

Science communication with the lay public or non-scientific communities has evolved over time (Amaral, 2015, p. 7) from unidirectional to more participatory. The study "The Public Understanding of Science", highlighted the importance of science in society, policies, industry and individual lives, justifying the need for general "understanding" of science, what means truly comprehending the nature and object of scientific activity and its research (Royal Society, 1985, p. 7).

However, in the so-called "deficit model" (Wynne, 1993, p. 322) of "public understanding of science" – PUS – knowledge flow assumed a unidirectional or top-down model, in which science is a "pure" source produced by scientists to the public (Pitrelli, 2003, p. 5), which is passive and has inadequate knowledge (Burns et al., 2003, p. 189). Scientific discoveries are usually popularized by media with simple language, leading to the loss of information (Pitrelli, 2003,

p. 5). Critics argue that this maintains scientists as "keepers of knowledge" and the public as "learners" (Stocklmayer, 2005, p. 4), without any type of dialogue or engagement.

During the 90s, international agreements like the Aarhus Convention, the Biosafety Protocol and the Agenda 21 underscored recommendations like "participation and openness", "public awareness" and "access to information" (Einsiedel, 2008, p. 173-174). These guidelines highlighted the role of scientific communities beyond practising science; they must also engage in dialogue with the public and share their discoveries (Einsiedel, 2008, p. 174). Science communication embodies this evolving ethos. The term "public awareness of science" – PAS has begun to be used as a model of communication in which awareness is increased through the involvement of personal experience and exploration, presupposing positive actions and opinions on the part of the public (Stocklmayer & Gilbert, 2002, p. 836).

The report "Science and Society", published in 2000, highlighted that the relationship between society and science was facing lack of trust, requiring a new form of dialogue with the public (House of Lords, 2000). The British government and industry began supporting and fostering activities within society, like: i) consultations at national level, ii) consultations at local level, iii) deliberative polling, iv) standing consultative panels, v) focus groups, vi) citizens' juries, vii) consensus conferences, viii) stakeholder dialogues, ix) internet dialogues, x) the Government's Foresight program (House of Lords, 2000). The report recommended that direct dialogue with the public should move from being optional to become an integral part of the process of research development and policy making. Therefore, the interesting and attractive public involvement in science communication has increasingly been regarded as necessary.

In 2002, the journal Science stated the term "public understanding of science" – PUS had come to an end and should be replaced by "public engagement of science and technology" – PEST, considered more inclusive. Science communicators should not simply educate the public, but rather interact directly with them (Science, 2002, p. 49).

Simultaneously, the importance of "scientific culture" has increased, meaning the modes by which individuals and society appropriate science and technology, for development and democratization of debates (Godin & Gingras, 2000, p. 44). Science and scientific culture should be valued and cultivated by the whole society, not only by scientists and researchers.

Often denoted as "SciCom," science communication entails the utilization of a diverse skill set, a wide array of media, interactive engagement, and dialogues to evoke meaningful responses to scientific information (Burns et al., 2003, p. 191). It encompasses dimensions, such as raising awareness, evoking feelings of enjoyment and emotional resonance, including an appreciation of science as a form of entertainment or art, kindling interest through voluntary involvement with science and its communication, shaping attitudes related to science, deepening science understanding, encompassing its subject matter, methodologies, and societal relevance (Burns et al., 2003, p. 191). This framework, that encompasses the previous models of scientific understanding, awareness, literacy and culture, aligns with what Burns et al. (2003, p. 191) describe as the "vowel analogy" – AEIOU: Awareness, Enjoyment, Interest, Opinions, and Understanding.

Viewing science communication from this perspective underscores its focus on communicating with broader audiences, but also includes the specialized communication that takes place among peers. Authors typically distinguish between two types of science communication concerning target audiences: (1) communication among peers and (2) communication directed at diverse social groups (Burns et al., 2003, p. 190-191). Science communication is more focused on communication directed at other publics.

When considering the application of this theoretical framework to the legal studies, two primary considerations emerge: (1) the terminology and (2) the type of legal research that should be the focus of this communication.

Firstly, regarding terminology, and as previously mentioned, the authors adopted "legal research communication" to refer to the "science communication" of legal research. The second point refers to the two primary types of legal research: pure doctrinal research and applied legal research. As previously discussed, pure doctrinal research includes philosophical inquiries regarding the law itself and typically has a narrow audience consisting primarily of legal researchers, judges, and legal practitioners. It is worth to mention that, in the legal field, the specialized domains (e. g. tax law, civil law, philosophy of law) encompass specific terminologies and concepts that will require the development of communication techniques, especially when the peers are not from the same area.

In legal research communication, the focus usually lies on applied legal research, because it is oriented toward law reform and the development of beneficial public policies that serve society (Brown, 1963, p. 5). Applied legal research tends to encompass diverse social groups interested in, affected by, or involved in the implementation of its results. However, within the legal research communication framework, all researchers, including those who produce pure doctrinal and applied research must challenge themselves to transform their investigations into communication that considers the levels of literacy of all stakeholders.

In this field, the term "legal communication" is frequently mentioned (Osiejewicz, 2021, p. 5). However, "legal communication" comprises a broader spectrum of topics and functions within the legal domain. It goes beyond the communication between legal researchers and the general public to include the communication between legal practitioners and courts and/or clients. Legal communication also explores a wide range of subjects, such as the examination of the effectiveness of law, the extraction of information from legal documents, the translation of law, the harmonization and globalization of legal principles, communication among legal professionals in diverse contexts, as well as the understanding of legal terminology and directives (Osiejewicz, 2021, p. 5). Thus, legal communication is a broader field that encompasses aspects beyond the specific realm of *legal research communication*.

In this context, we define *legal research communication* as the *communication of legal research with the potential to promote law and jurisprudence reform, influence public policies that benefit society at large or social groups, address how to apply and implement a law recently approved, clarify legal aspects and regulatory frameworks in order to help society or interested groups to make its better use, to discuss the social impacts of a law or public policies, among other*

relevant purposes like better understanding, debate and application of the law. This kind of communication employs a wide array of techniques, such as social media, interactive activities, and dialogues. Legal research communication will raise awareness, evoke enjoyment, emotional resonance, spark engagement with legal research findings, involve social actors who can provide input or benefit from legal research, and deepen understanding of legal research outcomes that may benefit society.

4. Stakeholders in legal research communication

In the process of identifying the target audience for science communication, understood primarily as the non-scientific public, The Royal Society (1985, p. 7) distinguished five categories: i) private individuals (seeking personal satisfaction and well-being), ii) individual citizens (engaged in civic responsibilities for a democratic society), iii) people employed in skilled and semi-skilled occupations that involve scientific content to some degree, iv) people employed in the middle ranks of management and in professional and trades union associations, v) people responsible for significant decision-making in our society, particularly those in industry and government

Burns et al. (2003, pp. 184-185) identified two primary groups of stakeholders: the public and participants. Their definition of public encompasses every individual in society who may serve as an audience for science communication. They further categorize the public into "six overlapping groups": (1) scientists, (2) mediators (such as media, educators, and opinion-makers), (3) decision--makers, (4) the general public (comprising the first three groups along with other sectors and interest groups), (5) the attentive public (those with direct interest), and (6) the interested public (those with interest but not necessarily well-informed) (Burns et al., 2003, p. 184). On the other hand, they refer to participants as individuals who are directly or indirectly involved in the production of science communication. (Burns et al., 2003, p. 184). They emphasize that participants are distinct from stakeholders because they consider stakeholders to be only those individuals with a vested interest in specific research outcomes. Notably, the House of Lords (2000) considers as stakeholders those "who have, or who express, an interest in the subject matter".

In line with Freeman's management studies, stakeholders can be defined as any group or individuals with the potential to influence or be influenced by the outcomes of a particular endeavour (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). In the context of legal research communication, the endeavour encompasses the communication of legal research and, adopting Freeman's definition for stakeholders, leads to defining the stakeholders in legal research communication as *those who can affect or be affect by legal research or by the outcomes of legal research. This includes a wide range of agents such as researchers, target audiences, communicators, public authorities, among others.*

5. A taxonomy of stakeholders in legal research communication

When starting a new research project, legal researchers should identify the stakeholders of their research, including their level of legal literacy, interest or experience in a topic, as well as

their, age, gender, profession, location, their role in the communication process, and their level of interaction with the research inputs and results. Legal researchers should also understand how results will be applied by each group. In this way, legal researchers will be able to publicize what they are doing, attract other researchers interested in the same topic, bring society closer (Graça, 2023) and act in partnership with stakeholders. This is essential to determine the appropriate actions to be taken for each category of stakeholders. In this context, the creation of a taxonomy of stakeholders would prove highly beneficial.

The primary significance of establishing such a taxonomy lies in the ability to tailor specific communication strategies for each stakeholder group, thereby minimizing redundancy, avoiding repetition of efforts, and enhancing productivity. Furthermore, the taxonomy of stakeholders is likely to play a pivotal role in conducting impact assessments of legal research, helping gauge the influence and reception of research outcomes within diverse segments.

To construct this taxonomy, we have leveraged the participant observation method, drawing upon our experience in communicating the legal research we generate. Furthermore, we have actively engaged in an exploratory project known as "Legal Scicomm" at the University of Coimbra Institute for Legal Research (UCILeR). The primary goal of the Legal SciComm project is to identify tools that can assist researchers at the IJ/FDUC in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of legal research communication. This project adopts empirical research methodologies, including surveys, focus groups, and various dissemination activities such as conferences. These methods have enabled us to broaden our understanding of the subject.

By grounding the taxonomy's structure on the principal roles played by stakeholders in the process of research communication, four primary groups have been identified: (1) legal research producers, (2) enablers, (3) policy and judicial decision-makers and (4) recipients and implementers (as depicted in Table 1).

The first group, legal research producers, comprises individuals responsible for generating legal research. They have the crucial task of translating social, legal and philosophical issues into law academic knowledge and solutions that can be assimilated by society. This category encompasses both national and international legal researchers, as well as undergraduate and graduate students specializing in legal studies.

The second category, enablers, encompasses supporters and advocates who play a pivotal role in raising awareness about legal research, advocating for its relevance. These individuals wield the influence to connect legal research producers (researchers) and implementers (governance actors), thereby ensuring the effective application of legal research for the benefit of society. This group includes research funding institutions and sponsors, universities and colleges along with their communication offices, legal research and development organizations, legal research networks, media outlets, science communicators, legal practitioners (lawyers, prosecutors, police chiefs, etc.), NGOs, non-profit associations, special interest groups, entrepreneurs, SMEs, corporations, labour unions, and commercial, industrial, and professional associations.

The third group, policy and judicial decision-makers, comprehends governance actors or political figures responsible for law-making and judicial decision-making. They possess the

authority to create, modify, and enforce normative structures, standards, regulations, laws, and judicial decisions. Policy and judicial decision-makers play a pivotal role in shaping the normative, political, and social landscape of society. This category encompasses national governments and ministries, national regulatory bodies, local governments, legislative branch representatives (legislators), the judiciary (judges), international organizations responsible for treaty implementation and the creation of soft laws, as well as supranational organizations like the EU and its institutions.

The final category, recipients and implementers, represents the ultimate beneficiaries of legal research communication. Recipients and implementers contribute to and benefit from legal research, often requiring a level of legal literacy. This diverse group includes individuals, companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers, universities, public institutions, and various societal actors.

Figure 1

Stakeholders in legal research communication

Category	LEGAL RESEARCH PRODUCERS	ENABLERS	POLICY AND JUDICIAL DECISION-MAKERS	RECIPIENTS AND IMPLEMENTERS
Group involved	*People who produce legal research*	*Key people with power to support, disseminate and advocate for the relevance of legal research*	*Political and Judicial actors in charge of policy decision and making with power to create, change and implement normative structures, standards, regulations, laws, or issue judicial decisions*	*General individuals, entities or groups of society who will exploit for personal, cultural, leisure, commercial, societal, and political purpose, and benefit from the knowledge and/or implementation of legal research*
Main role	They transform social, legal and philosophical issues in academic knowledge, solutions and broaden the legal literacy	They connect legal research producers and the policy and judicial decision-makers	They build up normative, political, and social structures	They feed or should feed legal research, and sometimes also demands legal literacy in different levels
Examples	• National legal researchers • International legal researchers • Undergraduate legal students • Graduate legal students (master, PhDs, Post-Doc)	• Research funding institutions and sponsors • Universities, colleges, and their communication offices • Legal research and development institutions • Legal research networks • Media • Content Producers • Science communicators • NGOs & non-profit associations • Groups of interest • Labor unions • Commercial, industrial, and professional associations • Bar associations	• National governments and Ministries • National regulatory bodies • Local governments • Representatives in legislative branches (legislators) • Courts • Public Prosecutor's Office • Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) • Supranational organizations (e.g., EU and its institutions)	• Individuals • Civil society • Companies, Entrepreneurs, SMEs, Investors • Public institutions • Social actors in a broad perspective • Legal practitioners (lawyers, prosecutors, police chiefs)

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

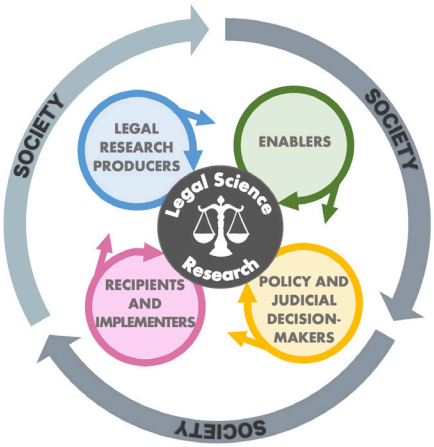
For a practical visualization of the four groups, we can consider the following example: When legal researcher Anne Peters (2018) framed corruption as a human rights violation, she opened a window for pursuing cases against corrupt agents in international human rights courts. Therefore, she serves as a notable example of a *legal research producer* (1). In turn, Transparency International (2022), a leading international non-governmental organization, advocates for treating corruption as a human rights violation. This stance supports the legal research conducted by Peters (2018), which categorizes the organization as an *enabler* (2), actively promoting policy changes and global awareness in this area. For instance, European representatives are discussing a proposed directive on corporate due diligence regarding sustainability, which may include corruption as a human right offence (Santos, 2024a). In this role, the European Union, as a governance actor, acts as a *policy maker* (3) which has the authority to create a legally binding instrument that defines corruption as a human right violation. If in the future, corruption is recognized as a human rights crime under national law in a country, society at large will benefit from Anne Peters's legal research (2018). This society would then serve as an example of the beneficiaries, or *recipients and implementers* (4) of this legal research.

Given the focus on stakeholder roles in research communication, it is possible for some stakeholders to belong simultaneously to more than one group. The overlapping roles of stakeholders, such as legal research producers being part of both the enablers and recipients and implementers' categories, highlight the need for research communicators to employ a broader range of strategies to address these dual or several roles effectively. Being part of more than one group can be advantageous as it helps the researcher to distinguish the stakeholders and the best communication tools, strategies, and approaches. Stakeholders listed in Table 1 are examples, not an exhaustive list.

These four stakeholder groups can be viewed as part of a cyclical process of legal research communication. Researchers produce legal research that becomes known to enablers. Enablers play a critical role in disseminating this research and, at times, advocating for its findings. They, in turn, engage with policy and judicial decision-makers, who construct or reform normative, political, and social structures to benefit individuals, entities, or societal groups in the group of recipients and implementers. These beneficiaries may also contribute to the legal research production process. At each stage of this cycle, stakeholders interact with the legal research process, providing support not only for communication but also for the legal research process itself. The closer legal research producers are to enablers, policy and judicial decision-makers, and recipients and implementers, the more effective legal research will be, ultimately benefiting society.

Figure 2.

Taxonomy of Stakeholders and interactions in legal research communication



Note. Elaborated by the authors.

Final considerations

Effective communication of legal research is crucial for it to be considered responsible and valuable for society, especially when seeking funding from EU institutions. The Responsible Legal Research and Innovation (RLRI) adaptation of the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) policy highlights the central role of communication and the involvement of stakeholders in producing responsible research.

After featuring an overview of legal studies and legal research, as well, discussing the relevance of science communication in the EU and specifically the significance of legal research communication in the framework of RLRI, this paper defined the concept of legal research communication. This paved the way for approaching the pivotal role of stakeholders in this field.

By structuring the taxonomy around the primary roles that stakeholders play in the process of research communication, four main groups emerge: (1) legal research producers, who convert social, legal and philosophical issues into law academic knowledge and solutions, (2) enablers, comprising influential individuals with the power to raise awareness and advocate for legal research, (3) policy and judicial decision-makers, who are political actors responsible for policy decision-making and have the authority to create, modify, and implement normative structures, standards, regulations, laws, and judicial decisions, and (4) recipients and implementers, encompassing individuals, entities, or societal groups poised to benefit practically from the implementation of legal research, who will exploit for personal, cultural, leisure, commercial, societal and political purpose, and benefit from the knowledge and/or implementation of legal research. These four categories form a cyclical process in which stakeholders continually interact with the legal research process, offering support not only for communication but also for the legal research process itself, enhancing the prospects of making legal research effective for society.

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