

Evidence Based Policy Skills

Lessons from TA for bridging the gap between science and policy

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Setting the scene: Evidence Based Policy

- EBP:
policies based in scientific analysis and scientific facts
- Scientists benefit:
 - Science wins relevance and status
 - Influence on the public realm
- Politicians benefit:
 - More succesful in realising their goals
 - Reduction of uncertainty & neutral grounds

Paradise lost: 'Policy & the Evidence Beast'

- Staman & Slob 2012: Qualitative study
 - Based on interviews with practitioners
- Complaints scientists:
 - 'Politicians don't listen' (fact-free politics)
 - 'Politicians are cherry-picking evidence'
- Complaints politicians:
 - 'Scientists present their evidence inconvenient'
 - 'Scientists don't understand the complexity of politics'

First analysis

- Misfit between evidence & problem
 - What is expected from the ‘evidence’
 - Searching in the right corner: Conflict on fact, on value of both Hirschmoller & Hoppe
- Excess of objectivity: Multiple voices of science
 - An implicit ‘Chief Scientists’ model
 - “Reality is rich and complex that it offers scope for a range of different scientific approaches” Dan Sarawits

Ordinary work of 'every day' EBP

- Politics and Policy making use evidence day-to-day
 - Standard setting, Enforcement & Regulation
 - Toxicology, food safety
 - Evaluation, Monitoring & Audits
 - Policy impact assessment
- Designing and developing technological systems
 - Expert based policy
 - City development, Water Management, Agriculture
 - White papers & think tanks
 - Aging Societies, smart cities

TA experiences with 'Scientific Evidence'

- Agenda setting:
 - Synthetic Biology, Making Perfect Life
- Broadening perspective (value based):
 - Animal welfare in animal production
- Creating a level playing field:
 - Broader views (ELSI): Persuasive Technologies
 - More voices: Humane Pappiloma Virus
- Linking evidence to political decisions
 - Electronic Patient File

Some Lessons Learned

- Expertise and evidence are necessary
 - Independence, Impartiality and the Public Good
- Recognizing Pluralism
 - Normative: Values, Norms and Life Views
 - Scientific: Dominant Science & Contested Views
- Instability Level Playing Field
 - Blind Commitment and Power Relations
 - Participants: Stakeholders, citizens and experts
- EBP → Evidence Informed Policy

Contextualizing EBP

- Evidence in Politics & Policy needs:
 - Understanding and respect for the worlds of science *and* politics
- Translation of policy issue to evidence question:
 - Familiarity with political analysis of issues
 - ‘Translation’ of scientific information to the political
- Linking process to content
 - Finding covert content in process
 - Process favouring certain factual perspectives
 - Process favouring certain stakeholders & interests

Contextualizing evidence

- Explicating the limits of science
 - Possibility of biased perspectives
 - Addressing the lack of scientific evidence
- Managing the limits of science
 - No clear-cut advice when it can't be given
 - No scientific report to neutralize a value-issue

In sum:

- EBP: making use of scientific facts and concepts in policy making (ideal)
- Misunderstandings between scientists and politicians (reality)
- Scientists and politicians often don't appreciate the extent to which they live in different 'worlds'
- Specific expertise is necessary to understand these differences and to be able to deal with them

Learnable expertise

- Institutionalised expertise:
 - Hybrid institutions (advisory and regulatory science)
- Individual expertise:
 - Experts with political and scientific bridging
- Creating a learning zone:
 - Too important to leave to talented individual
- **Fortunately, these skills can be trained:**
 - Setting up a training programme
 - Initiative of RI, KIT, University of Tokyo, support JST

More information

- Report: 'Policy & the Evidence Beast' available
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