



The Changing Role of Knowledge in Policy

Final Conference of the European Project KNOWandPOL

Brussels, 23rd September 2011

In Europe, information and expertise are now both more widely distributed and more readily accessible than ever before. At the same time, expectations of transparency and public accountability have increased. In many ways, knowledge is coming to play a new role in policy: we can now distinguish 'post-bureaucratic' from conventional 'bureaucratic' regimes and show that that each presupposes a specific kind of knowledge and a specific way of using it. While bureaucratic modes of governance require 'established' bodies of knowledge to be translated into 'vertical' regulations; post-bureaucratic modes of governance consist rather in attempting to turn actors' autonomy and reflexivity into a means of governing.

The way Europe relates to such new modes of governance is complex, because Europe itself is diverse and comprises different spaces where tensions between bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy play out in various ways. This new context challenges both research and policy-making, requiring much greater reflection on the nature of knowledge and its mobilization in policy. These problems were the central concern of the European project KNOWandPOL, and will be elaborated and developed during its final conference in four thematic sessions.

Knowledge or knowledges? In post-bureaucratic modes of governance, the multiple actors involved in the policy process each develop and promote their own ways of knowing. This means that policy-makers are faced with the challenge of assimilating, ordering and making sense of diverse knowledge claims.

Experts or instruments? Post-bureaucratic governance develops a multiplicity of knowledge-based instruments, which contrast and sometimes conflict with the traditional authority of experts. It also complicates the problem of governance, as each instrument fosters a certain way of seeing the world and of organizing relationships among public officials, citizens and professional and other groups.

Context or comparison? New ways of governing often entail the development of indicators, benchmarks and other instruments of comparison. These risk failing to take into account the specificities of particular interests, particular situations and particular times with particular groups. How and why has comparison become so powerful? How might we take account of the idiosyncrasies of context?

Steering or public action? The move from government to governance transforms the art of governing, which develops in accordance with a less hierarchical logic and involves a greater number of actors. In this way, it transforms and challenges the very functioning of democracy.

KNOWandPOL is a project funded by the EU and involving 12 teams from 8 countries (visit [domain removed as no longer valid])
Project coordination: Bernard Delvaux; Eric Mangez (Université Catholique de Louvain)
Time and place: 23 September (09.30-17.00), Fondation Universitaire, 11, Rue d'Egmont, 1000 Bruxelles.
Free registration: please complete the attached form and return it to Dominique.Demey@uclouvain.be