

Global environmental assessments: Comparison of institutional setups

Short description: Due to high degrees of complexity, environmental governance is strongly dependent on scientific input. Consequently, science-policy consultation, in terms of the deliberate efforts of scientists to advise policy-makers in science-laden questions, has become a key issue in public debate and scientific analysis alike. The intensified interaction between science and politics has not, however, come without tensions. The practice of science-policy consultation is faced with the dual challenge of trying to marry expert knowledge and political decision-making in the most effective way while ensuring the democratic legitimacy of science in society.

In the field of (global) environmental governance, one of the most prominent tools to link science and policy-making is that of (*global*) *environmental assessments*. Assessments usually do not entail conducting new research but they rather summarize, organize, interpret, and possibly reconcile pieces of existing knowledge, and communicate them so that they appear relevant and helpful for the deliberations of an intelligent but inexpert policy-maker. Assessments are often viewed as documents that convey information from scientists to policy-makers; meaning they are only reduced to the reports that they produce. This sort of conceptualization overlooks, however, that interactions between science and practice take place on different levels, make use of different media, and occur in different phases of a research and/or policy process. So, assessments are better viewed as broad communicative processes within and among particular scientific and political communities (Pregernig 2006).

Recent studies have shown that the effectiveness and legitimacy of (global) environmental assessments strongly depend on their *institutional setup* (Beck et al. 2016). Interestingly, some of the flagship examples in the international arena greatly vary as regards the way they are organized. In this context, it might be especially insightful to compare the following three assessment arenas:

- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, www.ipcc.ch);
- Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, www.ipbes.net);
- International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food System (IPES Food, www.ipes-food.org).

Master thesis research could provide pointed comparisons of the above-mentioned assessment arenas as regards, e.g. the following questions:

- Which type of actors are involved (esp. governmental vs. civil society actors), which roles do those actors fill and what consequences does that have for the effectiveness and legitimacy of advice?
- How much influence and authority does science hold and how much accrue to other modes of knowing and deciding (incl. traditional and/or local knowledge)?
- Which roles do non-scientific actors and the public play and how are their inputs integrated in a political as well as an epistemological way?

Methods: various (depending on research focus)

References:

Beck, Silke et al. (2014): Towards a Reflexive Turn in the Governance of Global Environmental Expertise: The Cases of the IPCC and the IPBES. *GAIA*, 23/2, 80-87.

Pregernig, Michael (2006): Transdisciplinarity viewed from afar: science-policy assessments as forums for the creation of transdisciplinary knowledge. *Science & Public Policy*, 33/6, 445-455.

Starting date: at any time

For how many students this topic is available: several

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