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Published in:
Journal of Developing Societies

2015

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses two problems characterizing policy thinking on environmental change and sustainable development. First, the role of the social sciences in the wider processes of governance is sometimes misrepresented such that the likelihood of achieving consensual decision-making on environmental phenomena is overestimated. Second, the social science discourse on governance is plagued by conceptual confusion. This article seeks to address these problems by outlining an analytical framework for environmental governance research. In the view of this article, scientific knowledge claims are integral parts of governance processes. The article advocates a holistic understanding of governance that includes the production and diffusion of scientific knowledge, political interaction, and decision-making as well as the wider institutional context required for policy implementation and enforcement. The conclusion is that the entire governance process from the translation of scientific knowledge into policy proposals to the implementation will always be laden with politically charged opportunity costs.

Keywords: governance, science-policy nexus, sustainability, environmental sociology, policy studies, institutions, science and technology studies

Introduction

The recent report of *World Social Science Report* entitled *Changing Global Environments* (ISSC - International Social Science Council, 2013) calls for a bolder, better, bigger, and different social science, capable of infusing social science insights into environmental problem-solving processes. In a summary of the key messages of the report, the authors maintain that social scientists must contribute to reframing global environmental change to highlight the aspects of the issues at hand that otherwise risk being obscured, for example, the social, cultural, political,

Vol 31(4): 447–466. DOI: 10.1177/0169796X15603236

and normative aspects, often ignored by other scientists. The authors state that this contributes to highlighting social problems such as economic injustices that require solutions other than the technical ones often sought. Moreover, the report maintains that reframing the issues at hand to uncover the social complexity of environmental change processes and the contested normative judgments associated with them will show decision-makers, stakeholders, and other scientists that broader and more effective solutions are possible (Moser, Hackmann, & Caillods, 2013, p. 51).

This type of reasoning is misleading in several regards. First, it overestimates the likelihood of achieving consensual decision-making regarding complex societal phenomena. As the longstanding academic debate surrounding the concept of sustainability suggests, merely reaching an agreement on a straightforward definition of such a term has proved to be extremely challenging. Second, it is based on what may be called a knowledge-action fallacy, that is, an erroneous belief that knowledge about a particular problem will in itself contribute to generating adequate solutions. Even if a scientific consensus on how to explain a phenomenon is reached, the question of how to translate this knowledge into policy remains. Policy analyses often involve complex scientific information and contested expertise as well as multiple ethical and moral dimensions. The sciences themselves cannot give clear answers as to the benefits of specific policies to society as a whole, and different interest groups may have different risk perceptions, face different risks, and seek knowledge from different epistemic communities. Moreover, most policy choices entail trade-offs and the policies designed to meet the perceived challenges faced by one group may create new risks for other population groups. Thus, the entire process ranging from the translation of knowledge claims into policy proposals to the decision-making and implementation includes a range of politically charged choices. For these reasons, the type of policy reasoning found in reports such as the 2013 *World Social Science Report* risk misrepresenting the role and position of the social sciences in the wider processes of governance.

A related problem is that the social science discourse on governance is plagued by conceptual confusion. Concepts that are central to discussions on environmental policy, such as, politics, governance, and institution, are often vaguely defined and tend to be assigned different meanings. This article seeks to address some of these problems by clarifying the meaning of key concepts that are central to governance analyses.

At the same time, it outlines an analytical framework for environmental governance research according to which the scientific knowledge claims are taken to be integral parts of the wider governance processes. The article advocates a holistic understanding of governance that includes scientific claims-making and political decision-making as well as the institutional context required for policy implementation and enforcement.

The article takes as its point of departure the debate concerning the meaning and usefulness of the concept of sustainability. It shows how critics have highlighted the tensions between the social, ecological, and economic aspects of environmental challenges ever since the term rose to prominence on the international development agenda. A brief review of this debate serves as an illustration of the difficulties involved in reaching a consensus in processes of governance concerning complex societal issues such as sustainable development. On the basis of this discussion, the article maintains that governance processes must be construed as dialogues of values through which different claims are, at best, reconciled. The article then discusses the meaning of the concepts of governance, institutions, and politics. Subsequently, it outlines the different forms of consensus and agreement that are necessary for governance. The article sheds light on the nature of the science–politics nexus before it concludes with a summary of the main findings.

The Social, Ecological, and Economic in Sustainability Debates

Ever since the concept of sustainable development saw its major breakthrough in 1987 with the publication of World Commission on Environment and Development report, *Our Common Future*, the social, cultural, and normative aspects of sustainability have been recognized as essential aspects of sustainability. In the 1987 report, sustainable development was said to consist of three separate but interrelated dimensions. Ecological sustainability refers to the maintenance of ecosystems and the conservation of species and a genetic stock to uphold their resilience to external changes or shocks. Economic sustainability denotes the maximization of revenue while simultaneously preserving a constant or growing stock of capital. Finally, social sustainability refers to maintaining the stability of social and cultural systems. This latter aspect also tends to be associated with issues such as poverty eradication and social equity as well as increased access to employment, education, and health care. Sometimes, this tripartite understanding of sustainability is referred to as "the three Es: environment, economy, and equity."

The 1992 Rio Declaration suggests that sustainable development means striking a balance between these three dimensions (Dillard, Dujon, & King, 2009; Foladori, 2005; Manzi et al., 2010; Rogers, 2008). Yet, many observers have noted that sustainable development has tended to be associated primarily with ecological sustainability. This dimension also seems to raise the least disagreement. The concept of social sustainability, by contrast, appears to have generated more controversy, and the definitions of the social dimension are more varying and seem to have changed more over time than the other two (Foladori, 2005). There is no single agreed-upon definition of social sustainability although most definitions include an emphasis on equity and equal opportunities. In European Union (EU) policy-making, both social and environmental sustainability dimensions are prominent. The EU Sustainable Development Strategy includes the areas of climate change and clean energy, sustainable transport, sustainable consumption and production, conservation and management of natural resources, public health, social inclusion, demography and migration, and global poverty. Similarly, the British Strategy for Sustainable Development and the Strategy for Sustainable Communities encompasses both social themes such as social cohesion and integration and equality of opportunity for all (Manzi et al., 2010).

Not surprisingly, the concept has been criticized for being too vague and too abstract to be of much practical use. For instance, more than a hundred different definitions of sustainability and sustainable development were identified by The Global Development Research Center. (Foladori, 2005). A main line of criticism is that sustainable development is an ambiguous and abstract concept that is "more talked than practiced." Critics maintain that the concept has been particularly attractive to policy makers since it represents broad objectives while leaving out clear commitments to an implementable set of policies. A related dilemma concerns the nature of sustainability politics, that is, whether or not sustainability is a zero-sum game of competing interests or one of converging interests where collaboration can result in mutual, overlapping benefits. The sustainability discourse has relied on the assumption that sustainability is about reaching a consensus so that various, possibly conflicting interests converge. According to Larsen (2009), sustainability means that changes must take place along all three dimensions simultaneously. This was also the standpoint of a World Bank (WB) report, *Making Development Sustainable: From Concepts to Action,* published in the wake of the Rio Earth Summit. The WB report sought to operationalize and

integrate the three dimensions of sustainability into a single, internally consistent accounting framework (Ratner, 2004). However, critics argue that this is easier said than done since the three dimensions are likely to be conflicting in many respects. As Norgaard (1988, p. 607) famously wrote about the term: "Environmentalists want environmental systems sustained. Consumers want consumption sustained. Workers want jobs sustained…With the term meaning something different to everyone, the quest for sustainable development is off to a cacophonous start." Given the multidimensionality of the concept, it includes an enormous range of issues, political actors, and interests. This suggests that it is very challenging to transform all of them into one consistent policy program despite the fact that the technical tools for the task, such as ecosystems sciences and environmental economics, have become more sophisticated. The main challenge with regard to finding a basis for a consistent approach to attaining complex ideals such as sustainability is that they are associated with multiple dimensions of value. Each dimension of sustainability engenders very different approaches, institutions, and policies for sustainability since they are based on different assumptions and different, and at times conflicting notions of the role of values in collective action, as Ratner maintains (Ratner, 2004). Thus, the sustainability agenda has been criticized for disregarding the inherent tensions and contradictions, and for being an empty mobilizing ideal promising to overcome ideological disagreements by falsely pointing at the possibility of consensual decision-making (Manzi et al., 2010).

Other critics have stressed that the distinction between social, ecological, and economic sustainability is artificial and untenable. It is indeed very difficult to separate economic and social phenomena from each other, meaning that it is close to impossible to distinguish between economic and social sustainability issues (Dillard et al., 2009). The boundaries between society and the environment are also opaque and it is therefore equally hard to conceive of nature as being entirely separate from society. Hence, some critics argue that it is impossible to study the three dimensions of sustainability in isolation in a meaningful way. Challenges such as resource depletion, atmospheric pollution, and loss of biodiversity cannot be addressed separately from other development challenges related to national food and energy security, or international politics, trade, and finance. Given the difficulty of distinguishing between nature, economy, and society, the argument goes that all the sustainability challenges are essentially best viewed as social challenges (ISSC, 2013; Manzi et al., 2010).

For practical research purposes, the broad-based, abstract concept of sustainability is probably best understood in practice as processes that are dependent on various regional contexts rather than a fixed outcome. It follows that an important aspect of researching sustainability consists of researching the nature and outcomes of governance processes from local to global scales that set out to achieve various environmental objectives (Manzi et al., 2010; Ratner, 2004). Governance is thus a key concern in discussions on environmental policy and sustainability since any attempt to achieve the latter requires the former. It is therefore necessary to clearly define what governance means in this context. Taking these criticisms of the term sustainable development as a point of departure, the article outlines an analytical framework for the analyses of environmental governance processes below.

Governance, Institutions, and Forms of Consensus

While government denotes the executive and administrative branches of the state, governance is associated with a looser and wider structure of institutions. According to Heywood (1997, p. 19), "governance is a broader term than government. It refers, in its widest sense, to the various ways through which social life is coordinated. Government can therefore be seen as one of the organisations involved in governance." The concept of governance indicates that the power of any governing body to act independently is constrained by a complex interplay of various local and international dynamics. It refers to the ways in which social, economic, and political activities of multiple actors are coordinated and conciliated in a particular context (Frödin, 2008). Actors and organizations involved in interdependent activities that require a division of tasks, responsibilities, rewards, and control over resources may employ a range of different decision-making and coordination mechanisms, such as, concerted decision-making, mutual adjustments, and joint planning, to allocate resources and address collective concerns in a joint manner. Governance concerns how multiple interdependent actors and organizations combine different decision-making and coordination mechanisms in order to coordinate and conciliate their activities. The concept of governance is defined here as the coordination and conciliation of interdependent activities via institutions. Institutions, in turn are defined as socially devised structures with a high degree of resilience, which enable, constrain, and provide meaning to people's actions (Frödin, 2008). In order to further clarify the precise meaning of governance, it is

necessary to briefly define the concept of institution, and to consider different ways of achieving governance according to different principles and rules.

Institutions have a social ontology since they are made up of shared, subjective representations and understandings. For instance, in order for money, in the form of pieces of paper or metal, to function as means of payment, they must be accepted as such. The fact that institutions have a social ontology means that their reproduction is dependent on a certain degree of collective acceptance. Moreover, institutions are only meaningful insofar as they are systematically invoked in various human relations. Institutions are social structures that establish various formal or informal rules that make organized social activities possible. They also regulate the various rights, duties, obligations, authorizations, permissions, empowerments, requirements, and certifications that are linked to a specific role, such as, politician, judge, policeman, professor, or medical doctor (Searle, 2005). Institutions determine various agreed-upon situation definitions according to which people act on specific roles, associated with different powers and logics of action in different contexts. Such mutually agreed-upon situation definitions are here called transaction domains. The term transaction domain denotes a mutually agreed-upon definition of a social situation according to which a particular logic of interaction, exchange, or decision-making is considered socially acceptable. Transaction domains establish particular routines according to which specific logics of action, such as, profit-maximization, relational rationality, legal rationality, reciprocity, commitment, duty, and so on, are considered appropriate or lawful. Each transaction domain is furthermore associated with different rights, obligations, permissions, authorizations, and empowerments, linked to a particular role or identity. Power and authority tend to be differentially distributed within different domains. Hierarchical forms of governance may be seen as appropriate in some domains, whereas consensual forms of decision-making are required in others. For instance, civil servants in the administrative domain may be obliged to comply with orders, while members of a political committee are expected to make decisions in a more consensual manner (Frödin, 2013). As consumers, family members, voters, or civil servants, people enter into different transaction domains where they have different rights and obligations and where they consequently act according to different logics of action. The distribution of resources and authority in various institutional settings is determined by the character of the overall structure of transaction domains, that is, the macro-distribution of different

repertoires of socially acceptable practices and principles of decision-making and exchange. The governance of large-scale societies requires a certain level of *domain consensus* in the widest possible sense, in that a sufficient amount of actors reproduce a set of common institutions. We use the term *domain consensus* here to signify the acceptance of an entire set of transaction domains characterizing a large social setting such as a state. Domain consensus is established when the interacting actors share the same notions concerning behavioral expectations, rights, and obligations that apply to a set of transaction domains (Frodin, 2009). For instance, a society may have reached a consensus on the notion that certain kinds of goods and services, such as cars and food, are allocated via markets, while other services, such as health care, are provided by public agencies on the basis of citizenship rights.

In addition to domain consensus, we may further distinguish other forms of consensus on the basis of whether there is agreement on means and/or ends. If people agree on means and procedures, but not on ends, they have attained *procedural consensus*. For instance, parliaments are domains typically characterized by procedural consensus while there is rarely agreement on political goals. Thus, societal domains in which consensus on the means and procedures of interaction (but not necessarily on the goals) prevail are characterized by *procedural consensus*. By contrast, we may speak of *goal consensus* if the interrelated *actors* share the same notion of the goal or end of their activities.

There are different forms of goal consensus. If actors agree on a unifying ethic as well as the ends of action, but not necessarily on the means to reach them, they have established *ethical consensus*. This form of consensus is explicitly centred on the adherence to values. Examples of ethical consensus can be found in the Brundtland Report, which concludes that sustainable development must become a global ethic in order to secure long-term human survival and wellbeing (Ratner, 2004).

If people agree not only on values and ends, but also on how to reach them, they have attained *technical consensus*. This entails that they agree on the meaning and measurement of a goal, such as sustainability, as well as on the technical means to achieve this goal. This form of consensus is centred on technical means–end reasoning. Technical consensus and ethical consensus represent different approaches to achieving complex goals involving different aspects and values, such as sustainable development. The World Bank (WB) report *Making Development Sustainable: From Concepts to Action* represents an attempt to reach technical consensus on the goal of sustainable development as it seeks to

operationalize and integrate economic, social, and ecological dimensions into a single accounting framework (Ratner, 2004). The problem with this kind of policy analysis is that it ignores the political processes preceding the attainment of goal consensus. The WB report disregards these stages and skips ahead to outline a foundation for technical consensus. In doing so, the report presumes the existence of both domain consensus more generally, and goal consensus, as if the challenge is merely one of applying science to address the various sustainability issues. The main problem facing the world today is the absence of both domain consensus and goal consensus, since this impedes many forms of global governance including environmental governance.

Given the array and diversity of values and ends included in the notion of sustainability, it is unlikely that any one form of goal consensus or any one way of defining and putting complex ideals such as environmental sustainability into practice can be achieved. For this reason, governance processes surrounding environmental issues are likely to be best construed as dialogues of values, as Ratner (2004) suggests. This means that environmental governance processes are understood as being *socially defined* by groups that make claims and interact in various local, regional, national, and global contexts. Moreover, objectives such as biodiversity preservation, economic growth, physical well-being, cultural integrity, and spiritual meaning are viewed as potentially competing ends, depending on how different groups and individuals decide to promote them. In this view, environmental governance inevitably involves some kind of conflict in goals and interests. Viewing the environmental governance processes in terms of dialogues of values means that deliberation and negotiation among groups promoting different goals, ends, and values are *constitutive* of the very meaning of environmental governance (Ratner, 2004). This entails however, that environmental governance requires institutions for resolving conflicts between actors making conflicting claims. In other words, some form of domain consensus is required for any form of governance.

Studying environmental governance as a dialogue of values involves studying groups and actors that make claims and counterclaims concerning the existence of various societal and environmental problems in specific contexts. It entails researching how various change and development processes are defined, contested, or acknowledged by various actors, groups, and organizations through claims-making activities and governance processes. The success of a political claim is taken to vary in response to the claims-making activities on the part of actors such as environmental

activists, journalists, industrialists, scientists, civil servants and politicians. This implies that the rank ordering of environmental challenges does not necessarily mirror actual or real need, but rather the relative success of particular claims-makers in determining the political agenda. A main focus of governance research is thus the varying power of different claims-makers in shaping the definition of a specific situation or state of affairs. This is off course not to imply that all claims are equally valid. It is merely to recognize that claims-making processes are a central concern to environmental governance research (Hannigan, 2006).

Power, Claims-making, and Governance

It is necessary to distinguish between governance and mere claims-making, since the latter does not necessarily lead to the former. Politics can be defined as an activity through which interrelated individuals and groups "articulate, negotiate, implement, and enforce competing claims to social change or to maintain status quo" (Frödin, 2013, p. 74). The character of politics depends on whether domain consensus prevails or not and on the kind of powers (such as, public opinion or the threat of armed force) that the claims-makers appeal to and employ. Thus, the ways in which claims are made, and the power upon which they are based, are of crucial significance for the nature of politics. We may distinguish different types of political claims such as competitive, reactive, or proactive, as well as formal and informal political claims. By formal claims we refer to claims made within officially sanctioned channels, such as parliaments or other fora for public debate. Making claims within formal constraints means accepting the formal rules of the game. By contrast, informal claims ignore the formal rules of politics, as when discontented groups deliberately ignore or violate the law. A primary requirement for attaining governance is that most economic and political activities rely upon, or are harmonious with, shared institutions, that is, that domain consensus prevails (Frödin, 2013).

However, institutions merely provide channels for formal claims-making and collective decision-making and implementation. Whether governance processes are successful or not is a different matter. Given the existence of shared institutions, politics can be seen as the non-violent power struggle between political parties and/or organized interest groups that, through processes of partisan mutual adjustment, lead to temporary compromises on the public interest (Hoppe, 2005). In such processes, groups seek to promote public policies, that is, courses and principles for

the exercise of public authority with the aim of increasing the probability of desirable outcomes and decreasing the probability and/or scale of socially undesirable events (Heyvaert, 2011). Addressing or preventing the undesirable requires knowledge and/or theories of its causes. Policies, thus, necessarily entail theories of causation. Theory and knowledge are therefore crucial to the objective of making policy choices (Manski, 2010). A first requirement for addressing undesirable events' is to acquire knowledge of them, how they are generated and how to resolve them. In theory, scientific findings may give rise to processes of social learning. However, knowledge is merely a necessary, but not a sufficient requirement for environmental governance since scientific knowledge claims do not automatically translate themselves into policy and social change. Knowledge-based social change involves social learning. Learning can be viewed as a process of behavioral change as a result of the acquisition of new knowledge or experience. Societal learning is more complicated than individual learning since it involves a large-scale social change in shared beliefs, values, norms, and institutions as a result of the diffusion and recognition of new knowledge. This is because knowledge concerning environmental challenges must be made available, operationalized, organized, and applied (Hannigan, 2006). Any knowledge claim must be diffused across society through various social arrangements. This suggests that both knowledge creation and diffusion must be supported by an institutional order. The sociology of scientific knowledge stresses three key aspects with regard to the role of science in governance, namely, that "knowledge never moves freely, that the value of science is the result of negotiations and that science and policy are co-produced"(Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2002, p. 83). The first aspect highlights the fact that science needs to be sustained by an institutional order and that other actors in society must recognize scientific claims. The authority of scientific experts is meaningful only to the extent that it appeals to a community recognizing the value and validity of science. Once such a community is in place, it may appear as if knowledge moves freely. The second aspect means that the value of scientific knowledge for policy is not given by its content since it feeds into the negotiation processes where other actors, including other scientists, are involved. Third, politics and scientific knowledge are influencing each other. Political decision-makers impact on the production of knowledge, for instance, by allocating research funds. At the same time, new knowledge may support and justify policy and the production of knowledge may simultaneously generate policy (Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2002).

In practice the relations between science and politics can be immensely complex. Politics and policymakers tend to enter into various relations with science. In other words, political interest communities and various epistemic communities interact and shape each other in various ways, indicating that the boundaries between science and politics may be quite fluid. Hoppe (2005) distinguished eight models or "boundary arrangements" between science and politics, ranging from technocratic, when science dominates policy-making, to models assuming the primacy of politics over science, and arrangements in which science-advisors and policy actors jointly shape political discourse.

Politics and science can be viewed as interconnected fields, that is, arenas of struggle with field-specific incentives and logics of action. In this view, forms of public intellectual engagement vary according to the different positions that producers of knowledge occupy both in their intellectual fields and in their relations to other fields, such as politics. The forms of public engagement and modes of intervention in public affairs on the part of knowledge producers may vary depending on genre (e.g., expert testimony, prophetic commentary, social criticism, and political satire), discursive forms (e.g., the petitions or diagnoses), or modalities (individual or collective). Moreover, knowledge producers may draw on their expertise and provide factual information to governments, they may promote changes in legislation, that is, the imposition of universal abstractions to which conduct must conform, or they may intervene in public life to contribute to the changing interpretations of various phenomena. The fields of knowledge production and policy-making may at times be highly interconnected through networks binding together different branches of government, various non-governmental actors, policy circles, think tanks, and academic institutes (Eyal & Buchholz, 2010).

In determining policy, there is plenty of room for disagreement and conflict since both political interest groups and epistemic communities may disagree in their evaluations of the nature and quality of the type of information on which risk assessment and policies are to be based. Policy analyses often involve complex scientific information and contested expertise as well as multiple ethical and moral dimensions (Joss, 2010). Different interest groups and epistemic communities focus on different risks and may consequently experience reality differently. Risk perceptions and policy priorities may therefore differ significantly within political and epistemic communities, as well as across social contexts and cultures. Moreover, facts can be value-laden and vice versa, meaning that in the

world of policy, facts and values are intimately interwoven (Gorski, 2013; Jørgensen, 2011). What counts as empirical evidence, and indeed knowledge, varies across and even within social science disciplines and related professions. Evidence may have a variety of sources, and knowledge can be generated by a wide range of methods, such as, survey research, causal and mathematical modelling, case studies, and ethnographic research (Reiss, 2011). This suggests that different disciplines and professions have established different "conventional certitudes," that is, different assumptions and predictions that are generally accepted as true (Manski, 2010). Conventional certitudes are established through processes of consensus formation. Such processes may not be entirely "objective" and "neutral" but also shaped by various epistemic and disciplinary cultures, as well as convictions, sometimes unfounded, that certain knowledge comes from trusted sources (Knorr Cetina, 2010).

Issues and phenomena may be framed, organized and labelled differently in different contexts (Hannigan, 2006). Frames serve as cognitive maps, and include "definitions, analogies, metaphors, and symbols that help actors to conceptualize a political or social situation, identify problems and goals, and chart courses of action" (Bleich, 2002, p. 1064). Through framing, people organize, interpret, and make sense of a complex reality. Thus frames help people to interpret and act upon specific issues, for instance, by guiding and influencing the understanding of available policy options. Differences in policy thinking may depend on variations in the ways in which different policy issues are framed. As a result, policies are not mere functions of unmediated material interests, or cost-benefit calculations, but rather of how interests are defined, constructed, politicized, and publicly mediated such that some positions seem "more feasible, reasonable, and legitimate, compared to alternative definitions of political reality." Frames thus shape how actors formulate their material and symbolic interests (Statham & Geddes. 2006, pp. 251–252).

The nature of framing of interrelated phenomena is also important in that it determines the extent to which various policies are understood in isolation or in a wider context. Both scientific disciplines and policy issues may be insulated from other areas and thus addressed in compartmentalized and fragmented ways, leading to the absence of integration and co-ordination of interrelated policies. Compartmentalization means that certain reflections are kept out from a specific area of theory and practice, leading to a reduction of complexity along disciplinary or policy boundaries. For governance research, it is important to investigate the relationship between different policy areas, the degree to which they

impact on each other, and the possible lines of tension and contestation between them (Joss, 2010). Policy areas may be more or less loosely coupled or interconnected. Moreover, policy areas may be more or less interdependent and may display varying degrees of functional complementarity, in the sense that they are dependent on other policies in order to function effectively. Yet, if policies are made in a compartmentalized manner they may become inconsistent to varying degrees, regardless of their actual interdependence. Given the possibility of policy complementarity and interdependence, a piecemeal transfer of policies across contexts may not generate the intended outcomes if they lack support from the complementary policies characteristic of the original context. This means that another point of contention between claims makers, scientific or not, concerns the degree to which policies are understood in isolation or in more holistic terms, that is, in a wider context of possible complementarities and inconsistencies (Jackson & Deeg, 2006). This latter point relates to the relative weight and importance conferred to nomothetic versus idiographic forms of explanations. Nomothetic analyses emphasize generality while the idiographic forms of analysis highlight the unique and specific of each case. Different disciplines have established very different norms and "certitudes" in this regard. The mainstream of economics has long since aligned itself with the nomothetic tradition (York & Clark, 2007, p. 714). Accordingly, economics aspires to the position of a positive science capable of formulating theories yielding meaningful predictions (Manski, 2010). The aim of much economic policy research is to identifying general relationships in quantitative data. Thus, it relies on the idea that certain explanations can be translated across contexts (Spicker, 2011). By contrast, scholars working in the idiographic tradition are typically sceptical of the notion of generalizability as an appropriate objective of their research, and many have consequently viewed any attempt at drawing general conclusions from single case studies with suspicion (Schofield, 2000). In the view of idiographic scholars, social phenomena are typically immensely complex such that even relatively simple social phenomena are likely to be influenced by a range of different factors. The policy implications of research may therefore be extremely difficult to state with clarity (Powell, 2006).

A further complication is that decision-makers may be involved, or have a stake in, a range of different policy areas. They may therefore be required to strike a balance between them. As seen above, decision-makers may have to mediate, not only among the claims put forward by different interest groups, but also among several different scientific

disciplines. Policy integration is therefore likely to generate conflicts of expectations or "role sets" when competing objectives must be reconciled and practicable compromises must be reached by decision-makers with multiple, and possibly competing organizational loyalties (Nunan, Campbell, & Foster, 2012). Moreover, as Reay (2012) argues, decision makers may deliberately ignore, manipulate, or exploit advice for very specific purposes. Institutional theories of organizations have highlighted that decision-makers sometimes conform to "practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work" so as to increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects, "independent of the immediate efficacy of the acquired practices and procedures"(Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 340). This tendency may be particularly strong in cases where decision makers are reliant on powerful external interests demanding conformity. Expert advice may also be used to "counterbalance" the expertise drawn on by opponents (Reay, 2012).

Taken together, clashes may arise among different experts deriving their authority from specialist knowledge, politicians whose power and authority are delegated, and various constituent groups with different values, interests, and risk perceptions. A further complication is that the clashes of various interests, ways of framing, and norms and practices (democratic, professional, and scientific) may play out, not in neatly delineated hierarchical structures, but in contexts where the norms and structures of decision-making are diffuse and multi-layered (Joss, 2010).

Framing is linked to power, particularly in case there is a disagreement as to whose definition of a specific sustainability issue will count. Some groups may seek to impose their ways of framing and defining a situation upon others, despite opposition (Hannigan, 2006). Thus, power relations influence processes of knowledge production, diffusion, and adoption since political considerations are likely to impact on the success or failure of various knowledge claims. This means that, in order to gain influence, scientists must form coalitions with other actors, such as politicians. In order for knowledge claims to become policy, legislators must view such proposals as technically feasible, and they must be consistent with the mindset and norms of the policymakers. The key questions concerning environmental governance concern how knowledge is selected and used in the creation of decision space and how different kinds of knowledge claims are varyingly evaluated, justified, validated, dismissed, selected, adopted, disseminated, processed, and balanced against, integrated and/or coordinated with, other claims. Development policies are usually products of complicated interaction processes involving multiple actors

making different, and at times conflicting, claims. For governance purposes, it is important to examine who the actors involved are and what motivates them. Power is central in this regard since ultimately, the pursuit of environmental goals involves making decisions about what to sustain, for whom, for how long, at what cost, and how. The question then is who gets to decide this, who will pay, and who will be held accountable for implementing the policies (Larsen, 2009).

Once a societal problem has been recognized as such, the issue must be translated into something remediable by means of policy instruments, meaning that experts such as economists and policy analysts take on a significant role at this stage. In other words, recognized knowledge claims must be operationalized into policy. This process may differ depending on how goal consensus on the issue in question was reached. In case merely ethical consensus was reached, the challenge of attaining technical consensus on how to address the issue remains. In case technical consensus was reached, the question is how. In this part of the process, it is relevant to examine how the policy translation is done, and by whom. This includes research on the relative weight conferred to different normative aspects in the resulting legislation, regulations, standards, or business codes. Other central questions concern; how policies prescribe and strike a balance between different forms of policy actions to achieve sought-after goals, such as voluntary and compulsory actions, or market incentives and direct government intervention through command control polices; in which spheres of society are different forms of regulation and enforcement considered to be appropriate and effective; and what roles are assigned to governments, the business sector, non-governmental organizations, and citizens (Dillard et al., 2009). Finally, the reception of the policy is crucial. For policy changes to be meaningful, a wider institutional framework in society must support them. In case the institutions governing most social and economic activities are weak, changes in policy will make little, if any, difference on the ground, even if technical consensus has been reached at the policy-making level.

Conclusion and Summary

This article outlines a framework, including conceptual definitions and criteria of significance, for governance analyses. It departs from a holistic understanding of governance that includes institutionalized channels for political interaction and decision-making as well as the wider institutional context required for policy implementation and enforcement.

When it comes to decision-making, governance is about reconciling and coordinating different claims, including knowledge claims, on the part of various political actors. For governance to occur, it requires some degree of agreement or consensus at several levels. At an overarching level, governance requires a high degree of domain consensus, meaning that a whole set of institutionalized routines and principles for interaction, exchange and decision-making, characterizing a wider society, is generally accepted. Yet, governance processes can never be entirely relieved of conflicts. While highlighting the importance of domain consensus, the article has argued that, given the multidimensional nature of most environmental phenomena, the hope of attaining any true form of goal consensus, whether ethical consensus or technical consensus in the environmental governance processes, may be a vain one. The article therefore draws on the notion that environmental governance must be construed as a dialogue of values, through which different claims are reconciled. Even if a consensus on how to scientifically explain a specific environmental challenge is reached, the question of how to address it remains. A problem found in some international development reports is that they tend to focus on outlining foundations for technical consensus as if goal consensus had already been attained. This means that such reports ignore the political processes preceding the attainment of any form of goal consensus. However, even after goal consensus has been reached, politically charged choices tend to be necessary. This article considers a range of social, political, and economic aspects influencing the process of translating a recognized knowledge claim into policy. The conclusion is that the entire governance process ranging from the translation of knowledge claims into policy proposals to decision-making and implementation will always be laden with politically charged opportunity costs.

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