P82 / 1. From Evidence to Rules: Contested Expertise and the Making of International Norms

Topic : Knowledge, Science and Expertise in Policy Process

Chair : Miguel Salazar Urrutia (Université Rennes I)

Second Chair : David Demortain (Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire Sciences Innovations Sociétés, INRAE, France)

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

International governance increasingly claims to rest on science. Climate targets are framed by IPCC assessments, food safety standards by Codex Alimentarius risk assessments, EU chemical and food regulation by expert agencies such as EFSA or ECHA, and environmental protocols in the Antarctic Treaty System by the advice of scientific committees. Yet the passage from scientific knowledge to international norms is neither linear nor automatic. Evidence is selected, translated, negotiated and stabilised by situated actors, through choices that are already political, before it becomes a guideline, a standard, a list or an obligation. Quantification and modelling instruments are central in this process: they can embed and lock in policy choices through "political calibration" (van Beek et al. 2022).

This passage is increasingly contested. The crisis of environmental governance and the transgression of planetary boundaries (chemical pollution, biodiversity loss, freshwater and land-system change) put expertise under pressure. Expert communities and disciplines compete to define problems and solutions, for instance when economic expertise enters issues long dominated by climate, biophysical or ecological sciences. These "battles of expertise" are reinforced as states and non-state actors use science to defend their interests. Beyond the influence of diplomacies (De Pryck 2022), private actors – from consultancies to industry and philanthropic organisations – increasingly produce data and may seek to influence the translation of expertise into norms. Symmetrically, transnational civil society can back, and even produce, scientific claims, but it can also call for the creation of new expertise bodies (Cornilleau 2019), or push regimes to innovate (Salazar forthcoming).

Work in international relations on epistemic communities (Haas 1992) stressed the role of expert networks in policy coordination, but its explanatory capacity has been questioned (Demortain 2017). Science and technology studies (STS) show how knowledge and political order are co-produced (Jasanoff 2004), how boundary organisations manage the line between science and politics (Guston 2001), and how modellers act as institutional entrepreneurs in global governance (Cornilleau 2019). Public policy research on standardisation and risk regulation reveals how technical instruments carry political choices (Demortain 2011; Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007). The growing dialogue between these strands has opened new questions on the politics of expertise (Littoz-Monnet 2017). Building on it, this panel asks: how, by whom and under which conditions is scientific knowledge transformed into international norms, and how do competition and contestation among forms of expertise shape this transformation?

We explore three hypotheses. First, norm-making depends less on the volume of evidence than on intermediary arenas and instruments (scientific committees, secretariats, models, indicators) that translate knowledge into regulatory formats. Second, competition between expert communities, disciplines, and public and private producers of knowledge shapes which risks are recognised as policy problems and which instruments are adopted. Third, appeals to science both depoliticise and repoliticise international negotiations (Louis and Maertens 2021): they can legitimise consensus, but also fuel conflicts between states, experts and stakeholders, with uneven participation from the Global South.

The panel welcomes comparative and single-case studies in global and regional settings, combining public policy analysis, international relations and STS.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites papers that examine how scientific knowledge is turned into international norms, standards, guidelines and lists, and how competition and contestation among forms of expertise reshape both science and governance. We welcome theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions, from single case studies to comparative analyses across regimes and policy sectors.

We are particularly interested in papers addressing one or more of the following questions:

· How does the crisis of environmental governance and the urgency of planetary boundaries transform the demand for, and the contestation of, expertise?

· How do appeals to science legitimise, depoliticise or repoliticise negotiations, and how are inequalities in scientific capacity reflected in norm-making?

· Which actors and arenas (scientific committees, secretariats, expert agencies, etc.) translate scientific evidence into regulatory language, and with what resources?

· How do expert communities and disciplines compete or contest dominant expertise, for instance around the integration of economic expertise into environmental issues?

· What role do private actors (industry, financial actors, consultancies) and civil society organizations play in these competitions and contestations and how do they shape the translation of expertise into norms?

· How do quantification and modelling instruments (models, scenarios, indicators) shape, embed or lock in international policy choices?

Relevant arenas include global regimes (such as UN bodies, e.g. the Codex Alimentarius, the UN-Committee on World Food Security, or the Antarctic Treaty System) as well as regional settings, notably European Union governance and its expert agencies, in domains such as climate and biodiversity, chemical pollution, biosecurity, plant, animal and human health, food and agriculture, oceans and polar governance.

We welcome contributions from scholars at all career stages and from diverse regions, from Europe to the Global South, and we encourage dialogue between public policy analysis, international relations, European studies and science and technology studies. Both empirical and conceptual papers are welcome