From Garbage Can to Cloud (Meta)Governance: New action perspectives for information providers and public decision makers

Central question:
How to improve capacity for delivery & uptake of geo-spatial information in (environmental) decision making?

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1. Some features of science-policy relations
2. Capacity building in the policy world:
   2.1 Dealing with organised anarchy: managing the ‘Garbage Can’?
   2.2 Garbage Cans and Governance
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   3.2 Increase capacity of spatial information providers
1. Some features of science-policy relations

Example: TTIP

Spatial info providers → Info system/study/research → Politicians

Could you be more specific?

Where? Which parts of environment?

(1) Yes I’ll do it; (2) No, I’ll pass

Is TTIP good or bad?

Is TTIP good for the environment?

Do you want the project or not? I need the answer NOW
1. Some features of science-policy relations

Different rationalities:

Spatial info providers

- Provide the best possible information
  - Methodology
  - Modelling
  - Networks
  - Mono/Multi/Interdisciplinarity
  - Transdisciplinarity

Politicians

- Take the best possible decision
  - Appropriateness
  - Feasibility
  - Short-term success
  - Postpone until appropriate decision is feasible
1. Some features of science-policy relations

Political decision making is:
- Usually not ‘rational’ and not linear in time
- Often better described as ‘organised anarchy’:

Garbage Can Model
(Cohen, March & Olsen 1972)
- Problems, solutions and actors moving from one choice opportunity to another
- 4 classes of objects
- Collisions of objects generate events called ‘decisions’
- From rational perspective, this is ‘messy’, ‘untidy’ -> therefore the ‘garbage can’
- ‘Cloud’ a better metaphor? [digital, invisible, location vague]
2. Capacity building in the policy world

2.1 Dealing with organized anarchy: the ‘Garbage Can’

Three approaches (Cohen, March & Olsen 2012):

1. GCM helps understand messy decision making world;
2. Create purposeful adaptations to a garbage can world;
3. Try reducing/eliminating GC processes: restore order!

1st approach is useful but doesn’t give any ‘steer’;
3rd approach is impossible (unless you replace decision makers with computers)

2nd approach is most promising: brings in some intentions/steer
-> how? Through dedicated governance frameworks
Governance = HOW (instit./instrum/processes/actors) to achieve objectives

3 basic governance styles with different normative assumptions about the meaning of life, role of government etc

Governance frameworks are combinations of the 3 styles, designed for specific challenges

Metagovernance is the ‘art’ of situationally combining the 3 styles into specific frameworks, and managing these
2. Capacity building in the policy world

2.2 Garbage Cans and Governance

Theoretical background

- Social-constructivism
- Social configuration theory
- Contingency theory
- Rationalism
- Positivism
- Rational choice theory
- Public choice theory
- Principal-agent theory
2. Capacity building in the policy world

2.2 Garbage Cans and Governance

Roles of knowledge

Usable knowledge is authoritative

Hierarchical governance

Not welcome/convenient? Undermine authority

Network governance

Usable knowledge is broadly accepted

Market governance

Usable knowledge is cost-effective

Not welcome/convenient? Undermine trust

Not welcome/convenient? Undermine price/quality ratio
"Yes, Minister" (The Greasy Pole) method to discredit any study/data in four steps:

1. Give reasons of public interest (e.g. economic growth first, 'greening' is a luxury)
2. Discredit the evidence that is not published
3. Undermine the recommendations
4. Discredit the persons/consultancies who wrote the studies (tree huggers, fundamentalists, publicity seekers)
2.2 Garbage Cans and Governance

Typical hierarchical instrument
2.2 Garbage Cans and Governance

Problem with hierarchical thinking....

“If you only have a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail”

Abraham Maslow
2. Capacity building in the policy world

2.2 Garbage Cans and Governance

Typical market instrument
Problem with market thinking...

“If you only have money, you tend to see every problem as a financial/monetary problem”
2.2 Garbage Cans and Governance

Typical network instrument
2.2 Garbage Cans and Governance

Problem with network thinking...

“If you only have trust, you tend to see every problem as a relational problem”
2.3 Increase capacity of policy makers

- Think longer about the relevant knowledge questions
- Be aware of knowledge questions in each phase of decision making
- Understand better the character/constraints of knowledge provision
- Invest in integrity regarding using knowledge products
- Metagovernance is a powerful approach: breaking blockades made of value conflicts, by making different views transparent and acknowledging each view as relevant
3.1 How to influence the uptake of spatial information?

Understand the ‘rationale’ of the political decision makers:

European Commission: Hierarchical organisation structure + professional network culture and extensive stakeholder involvement, + general preference for legal and market-based solutions

Knowledge preferences within the European Commission:

- Info provision should be fast (→ studies instead of research)
- Info should be timely (→ deadlines! → consult or universities?
- Data must be ‘fresh’
- Information must be ‘authoratitive’ (e.g. OECD)
- Knowledge should be transdisciplinary (include lay/stakeholder experience)
3. Capacity building in the spatial information world

3.2 Increase capacity of spatial information providers

- Try to understand the governance environment/constraints of politicians/policy makers

- Know the topical policy agenda: EU 2015: Better Regulation Package, new Circular Economy Package, implementation in EU of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Connect to policy makers (also informal contacts)

- Help policy makers to formulate the appropriate knowledge questions

- See if you can influence/use the Garbage Can / Governance Cloud in which decisions emerge (→ actors, problems, solutions, choice opportunities)
Wrap-up: From Garbage Can to Cloud Governance

- Political decision making is messy, untidy -> not ‘rational’

- This makes uptake of spatial information suboptimal

- Decision makers could bring some more intentional thinking in the ‘Garbage Can’ or ‘Cloud’ -> cloud metagovernance

- Spatial information providers should see if they can adapt better to governance reality of decision makers
Further reading / sources:


louis.meuleman@ec.europa.eu Personal website: www.ps4sd.eu