

Research supporting landscape policy : a challenge

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Introduction

We have been educated with two simple ideas. On the one hand, research produces knowledge and it is assumed that scientific results are naturally disseminated into society following a top-down process that leads to application of the knowledge. On the other hand, public action takes place within a well-established process in which decision makers arbitrate between public and private interests.

Moreover, research is interrogated by society to justify its very existence and its cost as well as to allay severe public anxieties: AIDS, global warming, mad cow disease... In this context, one can often read in the strategic plan of research institutes, in the justification of their research projects, that they are aiming to help public decision-making, producing tools for action, etc.

From the research world as well as from the policy world, voices have claimed that the relations between science and society were probably not so satisfactory as this model supposes, and that it was necessary to avoid such simple ideas. In consequence a renewed interest on the science / society interaction arose during the last decade. In particular, I would mention the works of Scott, Gibbons and Nowotny in the sociology of science, *The new production of knowledge*, who have identified the emergence of ‘mode 2 research’, the works of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, the working group “Bridging the gap” launched by the European Commission, or the initiatives taken under the German presidency of the European Union “Science meets society”, etc.

The present paper comes as an introduction to a session devoted to landscape and public policy, so I would like first, to come back to the context in which research is helping public decision-making, and secondly, to underline the importance of the issue as far as landscape is concerned.

I will start by a short description of the evolution of public decision-making. Then I will discuss the context in which science and public decision-making interact. Finally, I will conclude on the specific landscape issues.

Evolution in the decision-making system

We need to bear in mind two main points that have consequences on the advisory function.

- The extent of the decision making system and its polycentrism

Nowadays, we are facing institutional plurality and interweaving. This is a consequence of the assertion of Europe and the growth of regionalism. But, each level of government has its own

political legitimacy and its own view of public interest: this is a problem known as “God’s war”: no-one is right and everyone is right....

Furthermore, public action does not rely only on public institutions, but also on a number of private actors. There is no ONE decision maker, there is a decision making system with fuzzy limits.

- The consequential revolution

Nowadays a number of political issues are not quantitative, and are not sector driven. They are qualitative and cross economic sectors: health, environment, security, quality of life... In this case, it is no longer the public action itself that is important (to build roads, hospitals...), but the consequences of the action.

In this context, the question is not to coordinate the activities of the various branches, but to organise cooperation between institutions which have all their own legitimacy. The problem is to manage collective action while overcoming four main difficulties:

- The growing complexity of public problems that cannot be solved by simple technical solutions;
- The differentiation of public arenas;
- The overloading of public institutions all required to reduce public deficit and fiscal pressure, exacerbated by the loss of their staff’s technical competency;
- The insufficiency of staff in these institutions involved with the management of collective action.

All these evolutionary trends explain the increasing appeal to research.

Relationship between research and public action

Relations between research and public action are mainly characterized by their diversity: diversity of expectation as well as diversity of the patterns of interaction.

Public action can express various expectations of research:

- Generic knowledge on the process, dynamics and functioning of natural or anthropic systems;
- Data concerning the state of the system;
- Tool-kits and methods for the implementation of public decisions;
- Support for action despite the uncertainty of its effect or on its conditions of implementation;
- Diagnosis of system failures or crises;
- *A priori* or *a posteriori* evaluation of public policy, or at least of its instruments;
- Anticipation of and alerting to problems and crisis;
- Formation of public actors.

Depending on the nature of its object, support for public action can take several forms:

- Organising access to existing knowledge and data (formation, data bases, knowledge transfer..);
- Mobilising individuals as experts, either occasionally (for a crisis), or regularly (as government advisors);

- Setting up dedicated research activities, either prior to the conception of public action, or as a support to its implementation;
- More rarely, some long term cooperation between scientists and decision makers.

Looking at research activities, the works cited in introduction have led to a consensus on several obstacles to overcome:

- Research supporting public action, implying a complex interdisciplinary approach, but also an experience of dialogue between scientists and actors engaged in public action (engineers, policy makers): specific competency and know-how are needed;
- A simple 'end of pipe' valorisation of research work conceived according to pure academic issues has no prospects for support of public decision: the offer has to be adapted to the particular expectations and conditions of the interlocutor;
- An appropriation process of the final product is always necessary. This is called the "double translation": translation of a problem into research questions, and interpretation of the results into principles of action. But, this second translation is the more difficult and needs an important and time consuming pedagogic effort for which scientists are not well prepared ;
- An appropriate governance should be foreseen (codes of practice, definition of respective responsibilities, resulting in dissemination modalities...);
- A common difficulty is to harmonize the time-scales of scientists and policy makers and to overcome their mutual incomprehension: to get a real dialogue going is never easy;
- Some difficulties arise from the functioning of science (scientist's evaluation, difficulties for the evaluation of this kind of work). Nevertheless supporting public decision-making can offer some satisfactions to scientist but more often generates frustration (recommendations are rarely adopted as such, competing issues...);
- Several failure situations exist for the beneficiary: incomprehension, controversies insufficiently pointed out, lack of effort to deliver understandable results...

Returning to landscape

The conclusions reported here apply whatever the objective of the policy. Anyone would agree that what has been said on the public decision-making system is valid with respect to landscape: a qualitative issue crossing sectoral concerns, an object transformed in consequence of the action of numerous, uncoordinated private and public actors, a question concerning various institutional levels: Council of Europe, countries, regions, numerous localities, a large number of associations and citizens...

But landscape has two specificities that particularly justify a call for supporting public decision-making:

- Landscape is a new concern for public policy. Even if regulations aiming at the protection of landscape in some specific cases already exist in a number of countries, they did not constitute a policy in the full meaning of the word (an identified problem, explicit objectives and appropriate means to attain them). In France for example, the first laws are as old as 1906 but the landscape law (which is not itself a policy) was adopted only in 1993. Therefore we are lacking experience to conceive such a policy and to imagine its effects;

- The objectives of a landscape policy cannot be precisely defined at a global scale, and the concept itself is difficult to translate in legal terms. Therefore, landscape is a good example of this new kind of public problem, for which regulation only defines procedures, the precise objective of public action being decided locally. But then arise a first question whether a set of public actions can constitute a real policy, and a second question on the possibility of evaluating it.

Several countries have launched national research programmes on landscape (Austria, France, Switzerland). The European Landscape Convention underlines the need for scientific support. But at present, we have no results from these initiatives. The French national programme launched by the Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and Land Management in 1998 was explicitly dedicated to the support of public action. It should be evaluated soon at the scientific level and for its support to public decision-making as well. We will soon be in a position to determine whether we have overcome the challenges mentioned above.