

***Interactive comment on “The co-production of a “relevant” expertise – administrative and scientific cooperation in the French water policies elaboration and implementation” by J. F. Deroubaix***

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This paper employs the theoretical tools of science studies to address the principle of integrated management of environmental resources, in particular, management of French water resources. Deroubaix discusses four case studies involving diverse water management issues, but even though he identifies marked differences in political and administrative practices, the evidence he presents of processes and outcomes is inadequate to support strong conclusions. He says his main finding is that the user was cruelly lacking in these intellectual public policy communities.

Nonetheless the integration of the final user might probably favour real multidisciplinary researches (p. 3788). It is not clear from his cases, however, that including final users would have improved the outcomes. This conclusion appears to arise from ideology rather than from science.

Management of ecological resources certainly presents great scientific, administrative and political challenges. Such resources are generally public goods harmed by unintended consequences of activities with other purposes. The general question, then, is which harms should be reduced, how much, and by what means. Derouxbaix points out that science is not an autonomous activity; and should not be construed as independent from the social and political realm of interests (p. 3774), and this we should certainly accept. But if we think of three universes (1) the set of ecological problems, (2) the tools that can be applied to address them (technical, regulatory, and economic), and (3) the set of actors that may be involved, with their distinctive interests and perspectives, one imagines that to reach solutions it would be helpful to understand the characteristics of each universe. What works for rivers may not work for wetlands. Lacking any such systematic analysis, Derouxbaix's paper is merely a sequence of interesting cases, and his discussion a commentary on the problem of integrated management per se.

His cases involve:

1. The establishment of a network of researchers on hydrosystems addressing issues such as floods and wetlands, and

The development of policies:

2. To reduce pollutants that lead to eutrophication (excessive nutrients in the water),
3. To manage wetlands, and
4. To manage river flows.

The paper, however, says little about the effectiveness of these policies, or how the policy process may have influenced it. It is, rather, largely internal to the process. One

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learns, for example, that among the researchers on hydrosystems, those employing prescriptive modeling tools received more support from administrators and from scientists, that a collective cognitive framework integrating the best way to promote good governance and to conduct the research on aquatic ecosystems<sup>8221</sup>; was constructed (but with no evidence that it found the best way), that the French detergent industry accepted to reduce its use of phosphates but that other sources of eutrophying pollutants have not been adequately regulated, that an atlas of wetlands was produced based on multiple forms of expertise but that no responsibility for protecting the wetlands was assigned, and that a model prescribing controls on river flows was adopted, but it remained controversial.

These are interesting points. The details are complicated, but the attentive reader gains some limited familiarity with the French policy making process. One gains a general sense that policy is improving, but one certainly does not learn what makes for good policy in any particular case, nor how strong or weak any of the particular subject policies remain. The case studies generally are too thin to support any form of rigorous analysis, so in my view the social scientific value of the paper is limited.

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