

Accepted Manuscript

Title: Investigating science for governance through the lenses of complexity

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PII: S0016-3287(17)30042-3

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.futures.2017.01.007>

Reference: JFTR 2190



To appear in:

Received date: 10-1-2017

Accepted date: 20-1-2017

Please cite this article as: Zora Kovacic, Investigating science for governance through the lenses of complexity, Futures <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2017.01.007>

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Investigating science for governance through the lenses of complexity Zora

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Highlights

- This paper assesses the contributions of complexity theory to post-normal science
- Oversupply of facts in science for governance is explained as a matter of complexity
- Complexity provides an interface to engage with pluralism and uncertainty in science

Abstract

This paper assesses the contributions of complexity theory to post-normal science. The oversupply of facts in science for governance is explained as a matter of complexity, defined as irreducible pluralism in the knowledge base. The paper shows how complexity provides an interface to engage with the multiple facts of science through three different examples. First, water narratives are used to show how different scales of analysis produce contradictory scientific representations of the same system. Second, smart electricity grids are assessed to demonstrate how different levels of uncertainty are associated with different representations. Third, the case of slum upgrading is used to discuss the need to take into account stakes in science for governance.

Keywords: complexity; science for policy; post-normal science; pluralism; post-truth; uncertainty

1. Introduction

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