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Beyond the research–policy interface. Boundary arrangements at research–stakeholder interfaces in the policy debate on biofuel sustainability in Mozambique

Marc Schut^{*}, Annemarie van Paassen, Cees Leeuwis

Knowledge, Technology and Innovation Group of Wageningen University and Research Centre, P.O. Box 8130, 6700 EW Wageningen, The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationships and division of tasks and responsibilities (boundary arrangements) between research and stakeholders in policy processes in competing claims contexts. The paper starts from the idea that better understanding about the role of research in multi-stakeholder policy processes requires going beyond the research–policy interface, by analysing boundary arrangements at multiple research–stakeholder interfaces. The paper describes five episodes in the policy debate on biofuel sustainability in Mozambique. Within each episode, the boundary arrangements at the different research–stakeholder interfaces in relation to the policy context, research activities and stakeholder dynamics inside and outside the policy arena are described and analysed.

The analysis creates awareness about the complexities, pitfalls and opportunities of actively engaging in multi-stakeholder policy processes, as this is likely to result in situations where multiple boundary arrangements at different research–stakeholder interfaces co-emerge and coexist. The direction in which boundary arrangements at a research–stakeholder interface develop over time is affected by the credibility, legitimacy and salience of the research as perceived by the specific stakeholder group, the changing policy context and boundary arrangements at other research–stakeholder interfaces. Different boundary arrangements relating to policy content and policy process can coexist at a research–stakeholder interface. Furthermore, boundary arrangements show patterns of path dependency in terms of their credibility, legitimacy and salience for different stakeholders through time.

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1. Introduction

Interest in the contribution of research¹ to policy processes addressing environmental problems has increased considerably (Cortner, 2000; Dilling, 2007; Boaz et al., 2009). Although research is often initiated to support policymaking, many research outcomes do not reach the policy arena (Opdam, 2006), arrive in fundamentally different ways than intended (Kloster-

man et al., 2009), are used and ignored selectively and strategically (Burton, 2006), or become available during phases when policy solutions have already been elaborated (Schut et al., 2010b). When analysing these phenomena, scholars often refer to the (apparent) gap between research and policymaking communities; also referred to as the research–policy interface (cf. McNie, 2007; Cutts et al., 2011; Edelenbos et al., 2011).

The concept of boundary work has been introduced to better understand dynamics at the research–policy interface and

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 317 484635; fax: +31 317 486094.

E-mail addresses: marc.schut@wur.nl (M. Schut), annemarie.vanpaassen@wur.nl (A. van Paassen), cees.leeuwis@wur.nl (C. Leeuwis).

¹ For the purpose of this paper, we consistently refer to ‘research’ and ‘researchers’ instead of referring to ‘science’ and ‘scientist,’ unless quoting or paraphrasing colleagues.

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refers to the practices of safeguarding, withdrawing and (re-)negotiating boundaries between research and policy (Gieryn, 1983; Jasanoff, 1990). Boundary work acknowledges that in practice the role of research in decision making is negotiated and that research is just one of different types of knowledge and activities that influence the course and outcome of policy processes. Boundary arrangements form an important part of boundary work. Boundary arrangements are relational in that they describe the relationships, formal and informal agreements and expectations regarding the division of tasks and responsibilities between different actors or organisations in policy, decision-making, or other negotiation processes (Hoppe, 2005). In policy processes, boundary arrangements can for example exist between researchers, government officials, policy negotiators, and representatives of private sector or civil society organisations. Boundary arrangements can – but do not necessarily have to – be formalised in policy documents or memoranda of understanding.

Despite that several authors acknowledge that boundary arrangements can have different meanings for different (groups of) stakeholders, and are negotiated and renegotiated over time (Sarewitz, 2004; McNie, 2007; van Paassen et al., 2011), there seems to be a tendency to: (1) group or classify projects or policy processes according to the one dominant boundary arrangement at the research–policy interface (e.g. Sterk et al., 2009), (2) promote specific boundary arrangements over others (e.g. Cortner, 2000), or (3) suggest that boundary arrangements can be selected on the basis of a type of policy regime or problem (e.g. Michaels, 2009). Such conceptualisation of boundary arrangements may be too static to understand the complex policy practice in competing claims contexts; where policy processes are characterised by uncertainty, high stakes and pressure, and the involvement of a multiplicity of stakeholders (Waterton, 2005; Giller et al., 2008; Graffy, 2008; Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2008).

This paper seeks to portray a more dynamic and realistic image of the role of research in policy processes in competing claims contexts by going ‘beyond the research–policy interface’. This is done by describing and analysing multiple boundaries and boundary arrangements at the level of research–stakeholder interfaces; of which relatively few examples exist in literature. In addition, we explore how boundary arrangements are influenced by multi-stakeholder dynamics, how boundary arrangements evolve over time, and whether they show patterns of ‘path dependency’. Path dependency implies that boundary arrangements at any given point in time are influenced (either enabled or constrained) by previous boundary arrangements between research and stakeholders (Leeuwis, 2004).

2. Boundary arrangements in policy processes

In this paper, policy processes are defined as formal and informal negotiations in which heterogeneous groups of stakeholders seek to influence policy agenda setting and the development and implementation of policy (Leeuwis, 2000; Aarts and Leeuwis, 2010). Research is often used opportunistically and strategically by stakeholders to influence policy negotiations (Hoppe, 2005), but research itself can also be

subject to negotiation (Schut et al., 2010b; Pleijte et al., 2011). Below, we distinguish between boundary arrangements at the more commonly used research–policy interface, and boundary arrangements at the research–stakeholder interface, focusing specifically on the relationships between research and different stakeholders or groups thereof. Subsequently, we discuss boundary arrangements in relation to multi-stakeholder and temporal dynamics in policy processes.

2.1. Boundary arrangements at the research–policy interface

There exists a growing body of literature that seeks to structure and explain dynamics at the research–policy interface (Pielke, 2007; Turnhout et al., 2008). Hoppe (2005, p. 208) developed a framework that describes a number of idealised “models of boundary arrangements” for the “science–policy nexus.” Hoppe’s framework (Fig. 1) differentiates between models presupposing primacy for research (enlightenment and technocracy), models presupposing primacy for policy (bureaucracy and engineering), and models presupposing not primacy, but dialogue between research and policy (advocacy and learning). The horizontal axis represents the power relations and the degree of dependency between research and policy. The vertical axis represents the nature of the dialogue, subdividing between “divergent logics” and “convergent logics” of research and policy (Hoppe, 2005, p. 209). Boundary arrangements do not equal researchers’ roles, as researchers may fulfil different roles within each boundary arrangement. Table 1 provides a short description of the six models of boundary arrangements used in Fig. 1.

As explained in the introduction, Hoppe’s framework is often applied statically to describe or analyse the role of research in policy processes. One of the reasons is that the framework does not go beyond ‘policy’ as the unit of analysis. This complicates its application in the analysis of empirical case-study material in which research collaborates with multiple groups of stakeholders. This raises the question whether studying the contribution of research to multi-stakeholder policy processes could benefit from analysing

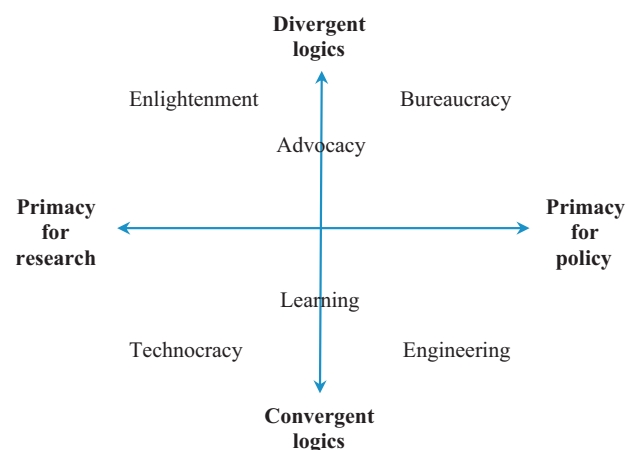


Fig. 1 – Boundary arrangements at the research–policy interface.

Adapted from Hoppe (2005, p. 208).

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