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Science and policy in times of multicrisis and dissent: Issues of framing, authority, evidence
– and political-economic power

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Abstract

Under what conditions can the interactions of scientific and political considerations in policy-making be both scientifically and democratically legitimate?

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This presentation will begin by explaining why and how the role of scientific advisors in official policy-making institutions is markedly different from those of many academic scientists. Policy-makers want scientific advisory bodies to provide advice that closes down debates, not continue or extend them. Risk-management policy-makers want scientific advisors to provide singular prescriptive advice recommending a particular course of action. Policy-makers like to claim: ‘we are (just) following the science’, but that is always misleading; but you cannot derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’.

A chronological sequence of analytical models that were intended to represent to role of science advice in policy-making will be presented and critically appraised. Reasons will be given for why the most recent model is the most comprehensive and accurate, and its implications for both scientific advisors and policy-makers will be discussed. The argument will be that if the contemporary model were properly applied then science-based policy-making could achieve and reconcile both scientific and democratic legitimacy.