Institutions on the verge: Working at the science policy interface

Abstract:
In this chapter, we reflect on challenges and opportunities for ‘boundary organisations’ that interface science and policy, at times of increasing complexity and polarisation and decreasing trust in the scientific enterprise, affecting the use of science-based evidence for policy. We take the European Commission’s Directorate General Joint Research Centre whose mission is stated as the “in-house science service”, as an example of a potentially relevant agent for change to improve the quality of evidence feeding into the policy processes in the European Union, while being simultaneously committed to the needed changes of existing styles and methods of scientific governance. This work suggests how an in-house culture of reflexivity and humility, could open up the JRC to the existing plurality of norms and styles of scientific inquiry, and adopt more participatory approaches of knowledge production, assessment and governance. The changes need at the JRC are urgent in order to confront the ongoing erosion of trust in ‘evidence based policy’, anticipating controversies before they become evident in the institutional setting in which the JRC operates.

URI:
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SALTELLI Andrea [1]
Publication Year:
2016
Science Areas:
Innovation and growth [2]

Keywords:
governance [3]
innovation [4]
policy [5]
policy analysis [6]
quality [7]

Publisher:
Consortium for Science, Policy & Outcomes, Arizona State Univ.
ISBN:
0692596380
Citation: