

Name

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Title of the presentation: The politics of experimentation in polycentric governance

Abstract

Experimentation is at the heart of polycentric governance, but conceptually experimentation is only weakly developed in the respective literature. There is a general expectation that it enhances innovation and learning for the common good. We argue that this rests on naïve assumptions about experiments working either as neutral tools for testing a pre-existing objective reality (in positivist terms), or as free and equal processes of collectively constructing realities (in pragmatist terms). We here see as a dangerous myopia with regard to how conflict and asymmetric power relations. To overcome this we systematically discuss the politics of experimentation. We conceptually reconstruct the experimental processes for moments of decision at which learning is directed and shaped for specific interests, and we illustrate them with results of empirical studies into innovation in governance. Our conclusion calls for more vigilant research into how experiments are actually done, suggest that constitutional aspects of experimental governance need to be publicly discussed, and emphasizes that nothing less is at stake here than the future of democracy.

Short bio

Jan-Peter Voß is Juniorprofessor and Head of the Sociology of Politics unit at the Technische Universität Berlin, Germany, where he initiated the Innovation in Governance Research Group in 2008. Combining sociology, political science and science and technology studies (STS), he takes a broad view on governance as the shaping of collective orders. A special focus is on the co-production of political and epistemic authority, recently also on aesthetic practices. He is co-editor of *Knowing Governance. The Epistemic Construction of Political Order* (2016, with Richard Freeman), of *Reflexive Governance for Sustainable Development* (2006, with Dierk Bauknecht and René Kemp), and is author of *Designs on Governance. Development of Policy Instruments and Dynamics in Governance* (2007).