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Institutional learning in IA? What we assume on the communicative process

Communication and interaction between different groups is increasingly being seen as a requirement for the efficient integration of environmental aims. One sign of this is the extension of the global change-focused, policy relevant field of Integrated Assessment (IA) to beyond natural science, modelling-focused activities include direct interaction with stakeholders such as decision-makers and citizens. A survey of the literature on Integrated Assessment projects shows, however, that the understanding of communication and deliberation in these integration processes has so far been relatively unproblematised. Interaction between stakeholders and scientists is often described as a relatively straightforward process, characterised by an open and unbiased exchange of information and learning. This paper argues that such an understanding differs from real life speaking processes, for which characteristics include that communication is driven by interests developed outside the interaction process—a fact that results in limited learning in shorter communication processes that do not sufficiently include or take account of the every-day context external to the process. The paper argues that these differences between ideal and constrained communication situations can be illuminated through contrasting Habermasian and Foucauldian understandings of interaction. It argues that in order to accomplish science-stakeholder interaction and impact knowledge and learning, a much deeper understanding and process of communication is needed, that takes into account the constraints on peoples' actions, their motivations and institutionalised patterns of adaptation to change.