

Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination" IO, 46:1, Winter 1992.

Causal Argument

"The view presented in this volume is that epistemic communities are channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments as well as from country to country." (p.27)

Epistemic communities influence state interest by :

- Elucidating the cause and effect relationships and providing advice about the likely results of various courses of actions following a shock or crisis
- Shedding light on the nature of the complex inter-linkages between issues and on the chain of events that might proceed either from failure to take action or from instituting a particular policy
- Helping to define the self-interests of a state or factions within it and
- Helping to formulate policies through framing of alternatives, implications of possible actions, etc.

Definition

An "epistemic community" is a network of knowledge-based experts or groups with an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within the domain of their expertise. Members hold a common set of causal beliefs and share notions of validity based on internally defined criteria for evaluation, common policy projects, and shared normative commitments.

Importance of Non-Systemic Approach

System-level and unit-level analyses are important but fragmentary lenses through which to understand international cooperation and the evolution of state interests. Prevailing ideas, such as those enunciated by Keynes, may at times be an important determinant of policy choices and persistence. The origin of interests and cooperation may at times fall outside of the realm of realism's "balance of capabilities", and fall more in the realm of distribution of knowledge.

The post-WWII modern state underwent a major period of professionalization and bureaucratization. Technological change, the explosion in the number of nation-states and the diffusion of administrative reform through de-colonization combined to create increasingly complicated public policy challenges.

Policymakers therefore faced ever-larger asymmetries of information, particularly in areas that required technical expertise. Epistemic communities were then afforded more deference in public policy circles, and more influence. Though the number of members in these epistemic communities tends to be relatively small, the political infiltration of an epistemic community into governing institutions can lay the groundwork for a broader acceptance of

the community's beliefs and ideas about the proper construction of social reality.

Research Program

The research agenda, as argued by Haas, involves identifying community membership, determining the community members' principled and causal beliefs, tracing their activities, and demonstrating their influence on decision makers at various points in time.

Comparative studies of organizations are necessary, where the community is present in a certain policy area and has been active and those in which it has not been active or wholly absent.

Comments

Under what conditions are these communities important in formulating state interests?

It is clear that their role is heightened in instances of information asymmetry – policymakers require knowledgeable experts when they are faced with a decision about which they have little background knowledge. It is also clear that in times of failed policies, there may be an opportunity for this community to present alternatives that may be adopted.

What is unclear is how fractured the community can be and yet still maintain its level of effectiveness. Moreover, does the number of groups in a given community affect the efficiency with which the community can convey a clear body of knowledge and influence policymakers? Combining this literature with the work of Janis and others regarding the dynamic of “group think”, are there conditions under which policymakers are more or less open to these outside groups that may be positing views in direct opposition to the policies being pursued at the time?

Cites: 30