The failure to integrate social and natural sciences: lessons from the parliamentary inquiry into natural gas extraction in Groningen

Kennisplatform
Leefbaar en Kansrijk
Groningen

OUR THREE CORE THEMES

Knowledge Platform on the societal impact of gas extraction from the Groningen field.

1. Social impact and disruption.
2. Restoring relations and trust.
3. Lessons from the gas extraction case for the energy transition.

TASKS AND ROLE

- Conducting short research projects.[1,2]
- Integrating and disseminating knowledge from different disciplines.[3,4]
- Organizing events to stimulate knowledge sharing among stakeholders.

Observation: Greater connection and collaboration between social and natural sciences is lacking.

MAIN INSIGHTS PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY REPORT[5]

"The Committee finds it objectionable that for a long time NAM held a knowledge monopoly, and that this was not examined by anyone." (p. 73)

- The Dutch government did not possess sufficient knowledge so it depended on the industry partners.
- The Dutch government and industry employed scientific knowledge production strategically over the years.
- No transparent communication over known or unknown consequences of production.
- Science was used to downplay effects and delay policy decisions.
- No openness to independent researchers and critical views.
- Societal insights scarcely used.
- Loss of trust in science and among stakeholders.

STATE OF THE ART OF GOVERNANCE KNOWLEDGE

- Little interdisciplinary contact among scientists.
- 3 knowledge platforms working on the Groningen field (*Kennisprogramma Effecten Mijnbouw, Kennisplatform Leefbaar en Kansrijk Groningen, BuildinG*) but no structural contact.
- No structural representation of social sciences in policy domains.

RECOMMENDATION 9A

- Maintaining and extending knowledge base essential for both Groningen and future energy projects.
- Integrating and valuing different disciplinary (social and natural sciences) insights in making decisions in the future.
- Even small activities in the subsurface may cause substantial societal impact.

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE

- Social license to operate (SLO) crucial for acceptance and consequent successfulness of subsurface activities.
- To gain and maintain SLO meaningful participation, communication, equal distribution of environmental harms and goods, transparency, procedural justice and recognition of potential impacts are crucial.
- Introduction of Social Impact Assessment in the Netherlands needed to assure better mitigation policies during lifespan of energy projects.

THE WAY FORWARD – HOW?

- Seeing social and natural sciences as equally important in contributing to policies.
- Identifying ways of most effective communication, based on existing trust configurations.
- Science communication as a means of rebuilding trust and collaboration.

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