

Regulatory knowledge and regulatory concepts

The talk argues for a historical understanding of a specific form of knowledge which is attached to the practices of regulatory science: regulatory knowledge. By definition, regulatory science deals with problems that are thought of not belonging to the normal spectrum of scientific work, i.e., they are 'trans-scientific'. In order to bridge science and other social spheres, regulatory science and regulatory knowledge carry certain features deemed to fulfil this task. So far, three major approaches have been set up for studying regulatory science and knowledge: the structural point of view, Foucault's concept of governmentality, and sociology of knowledge. After briefly presenting each of them, the talk proposes the study of regulatory concepts as an additional avenue. Its main advantage, arguably, is their carrying the necessary ambiguity to connect different social spheres and to fulfil specific functions in each social system. In this respect, the notion of regulatory concept is borrowed from the use of boundary concepts in science studies. In a final part, the talk elaborates the characteristics of regulatory concepts with the example of limit values, or threshold values, in chemicals control in the second half of the twentieth century.