

Abstracts

Schoonenboom

Scenarios in future research and policymaking

Creating scenarios of the future as an instrument for policymaking has developed in thirty years from a guerilla activity to daily practice. The assumption behind is that scenarios can be helpfull in dealing with cognitive and normative uncertainty in policy-making. At the same time the present popularity of scenarios seems to reflect primarily a fashion in practices of policymaking and is not visible in a

Bakker

Scenario's in between rationality, systemic force and political reason

Scenarios are popular within the world of policymaking and public administration. In order to be prepared for an uncertain future exploring and comparing alternative images of this future seems to be a useful supporting instrument for making strategic choices. Future studies in the form of scenarios are at the same time regarded as being problematic and often end up in nowhere land after publication. An extensive and foggy variety of methods used, a hardly visible

high degree of utilization in actual policies. In this article both the importance and the necessity of scenarios for policymaking are put into perspective; scenarios only play a marginal role in public discourse and policy innovation. Argued is that one of the reasons for this marginal role lies in the presentation of the different scenarios as a closed and logical realities. It is advisable to approach in scenarios the future more in terms of presenting questions and articulating uncertainties and risks.

use of the insights presented as well as an unclear role within processes of policy- and decision-making, contribute to doubts on the usefulness of scenarios; both by scientists and by policymakers.

In this article the possibilities and limitations of scenarios for policymaking are explored from a policy-sciences perspective. Argued is that scenarios can be fruitful for discourses on strategic policy- and decision-making, for political reasoning. Preconditions are that the studies are directly linked to the interests and activities of the relevant forums involved and are founded upon systematic scientific analysis and justification.

Van Asselt, Van 't Klooster and Van Notten
Assessing the future in uncertainty

Assessing the future is a social process in which outlooks of a society or important subsystems are studied. Such 'future studies' (in Dutch: 'toekomst-verkenningen') usually aim at the integration of knowledge in internally consistent images of the future. In this article the history of future studies is described with a special focus on the Dutch context. In exploring the specific challenges that are con-

nected with future studies we argue that on theoretical grounds uncertainty and discontinuity of developments and the plurality of images of the future are important themes which result in typical methodological challenges or problems. In this article is shown on the basis of empirical research into the Dutch practice, that uncertainty, discontinuity and plurality are problematic elements in the practice of future studies. It is needed to assess how these elements can be adequately dealt with.

Dijstelbloem and De Beer
A matter of selection: the government and the transfer of information via the internet

This article analyses the significance of the internet as a medium for the societal dissemination of information and the role of government in this area. Although much information on the internet is said to be unreliable, especially the so-called 'lay expertise', this kind of information should nevertheless be judged favourably, because it acts as a countervailing power to the information dissemi-

nated by the government, the scientific community and the industry. Nevertheless, the huge and chaotic amount of information on the internet, makes some selection and quality control indispensable. There might be a role for the government if commercial and other private organisations fail to perform this task satisfactorily. E.g. the government might support the creation of portals and stimulate private initiatives which combine lay expertise with scientific knowledge to foster public debate on important social questions.