



Extended Abstract

Information in the Knowledge Democracy

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Fact judgment and value allocation are the two fundamental elements of contemporary public policy making, while knowledge, especially scientific and technological knowledge, is the basis of the former. In public policy making, the fact, which has multiple dimensions and is twinned with value, often arouses several different knowledge claims; however, only the ‘public knowledge’ should be taken as the fundamentals of fact judgment in a rational public policy making [1-3]. As multiply consensual understandings of public decision relevant fact, public knowledge is scientifically rational, communally owned and politically legitimate [4]. Public knowledge, through the procedures of proposing, arguing, merging and legitimating, public knowledge is also the outcome of gaming among multiple social actors with certain ways of knowing and inclinations of value [5]. Therefore, it is a showing of knowledge democracy.

Knowledge democracy requires all the actors in a policy making have equal right to access, transmit, and use the relevant information of all the factors in the policy topic for proposing and arguing a knowledge claim. As the representation of the nature and existing state of a matter, information is the same to everyone, who is accessing, transmitting, and using it. Therefore, democracy is the natural requirement of information. To eliminate the technical and social privilege in the information acquisition, dissemination and utilization by perfect political system, is a guarantee of promoting knowledge democracy.

The production of public knowledge is a kind of social behavior highly institutionalized and organized, and has formed system in each functional society with respective characteristics. The Basis for the production of public knowledge is called by some scholars ‘the civic epistemology’^[6]. There are five factors shaping the democracy in the public knowledge production at least. They are the followings:

- (1) The actors and their roles. Producers of public knowledge is not limited to natural and social scientists and technical experts, humanity scholars, businessmen, media workers, government officials and the ordinary citizens may become participants, played a variety of roles. Among them, the government officials play the core role, as the main demander and producer of public

knowledge, and event organizer and arbiter of legitimacy of the public knowledge. Other actors could influence government officials' decisions.

(2) The production process. Public knowledge production generally includes the following four basic stages: identifying knowledge needs, expressing knowledge claims, arguing and legitimating. Public knowledge production process and public decision-making process are closely intertwined. Knowledge needs are put forward in the public policy agenda-setting stage. Expressing knowledge claims takes place in the stage of programme development. Arguing of different claims is in decision-making stage. Actors exchange their ideas, defend their claims by debating others. As most of the actors reached a certain degree of consensus, public authority decides which knowledge claim is needed as the intellectual basis for decision-making, the decision process is advocated legalization of public knowledge.

(3) The production space. Being different from scientific and technological knowledge, which is produced within the scientific community, public knowledge is produced in the wider public domain. These public areas include a formal political space provided by the system, such as Parliament, the courts and administrative bodies, as well as squares, streets, citizens' forum and other places for spontaneous public expression of knowledge. Public media and virtual network are very important platforms for public knowledge production.

(4) The production organization. Public knowledge production is a highly organized social activity. The organizations involved in the production and their organizational level are various. Governments, universities, research institutions, industrial organizations, civic societies and the public media are main organization types. Any one of the organizations takes its own part and cooperates with others in the public knowledge production. Usually the government plays the core role, others should focus their parts on the government.

(5) The public accountability. Accountability is united with authority, based on the logic of the corresponding responsibility must be held by power. As long as there is some kind of power accident, someone must take responsibility. Public knowledge production is a side of public policy making, a kind of political activity. If any technical mistake due to wrong fact judgment occurs, someone of the actors must bear the responsibility, because they hold the power in the public knowledge production. The accountability system of public knowledge production is similar to the accountability system of public administration. Government officials exercise the main public power, so there is no doubt that they must bear the responsibility, including moral responsibility, political responsibility, administrative responsibility and legal liability. Besides the government officials, the other actors, especially the knowledge experts shall assume the responsibilities also, whether how to hold them accountable, there is still considerable controversy, pending further study.

Information about the above five factors must be open to every actor in the public knowledge production, without any privilege and limit, so as to improve the knowledge democracy.

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