THE DELEGATION FOR LONG-RANGE PLANNING AND EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES
Contact: delegpepp@lecese.fr - +33(0)1.44.43.60.66

2013-30

PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE AND DYNAMIC OF INNOVATION

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
LIBERTÉ - ÉGALITÉ - FRATERNITÉ
CONSEIL ÉCONOMIQUE SOCIAL ET ENVIRONNEMENTAL

Since its incorporation into constitution in 2005, the Precautionary Principle (PP) has been the subject of many debates and controversies regarding its use and usefulness. Its supporters consider it insufficient to effectively prevent all types of risks; its detractors perceive it as an obstacle to the innovation and competitiveness of our country.

One thing is clear: the PP is often evoked in any context and out of context. Its definition limits its application to situations of uncertain risk in the domain of the environment and by extension that of health. This principle cannot guarantee zero risk, as any activity is potentially dangerous to humans. Its legitimate application encourages greater research efforts to improve the understanding of potential risk.

This principle of action is based on:

- Methodical doubt (during evaluation, scientists must be able to state the certainties and uncertainties related to hazards, exposures and risks);
- Early consideration of uncertain risks;
- A multidimensional approach to risk-generating activities.

This is not a principle of abstaining requiring proof of innocuousness as a prerequisite for any authorization. It is distinguished from principles of prevention and precaution, which apply only to proven risks.

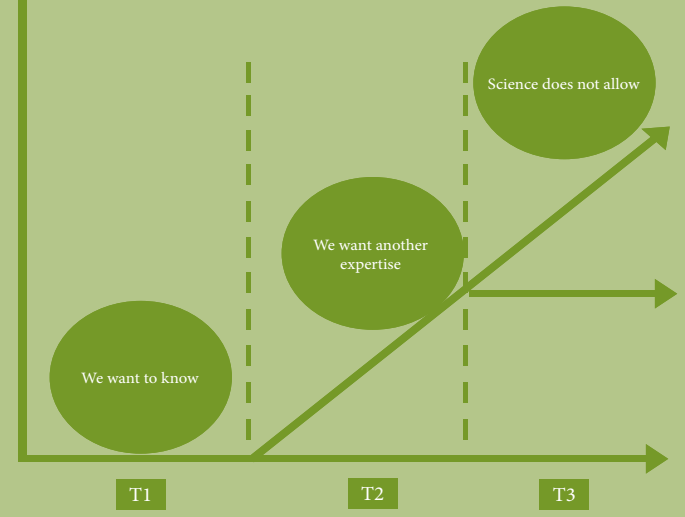
The study is articulated around three:

- the origins of this forward-looking principle, whose legal basis limits its application to situations of uncertainty;
- the establishment of a principle torn between reasonable doctrine and opportunistic exploitation;
- the dynamic character of the PP, which makes it a principle of action for more equally shared progress. The example of mobile telephony is used to illustrate a reasonable application of the PP, faced with the potential risks of exposure to electromagnetic waves via relay antennas and the use of phones.

In the end, the ESEC believes that the PP can be considered as a driver of innovation in the service of mankind and future generations, when the conditions of its proper application are met.

The deployment of mobile telephony raises various concerns about the exposure to electromagnetic waves linked to the use of mobile phones and the installation of relay antennas near living areas.
Many initiatives taken by stakeholders in the sector exist to assess and manage the risks related to such exposure (like the implementation of taxes to finance and guarantee independent research and exposure measurements).
Recent assessments seem to move towards an extension of the application of the PP to exposure to various electromagnetic fields from technologies such as Bluetooth, wi-fi...

Trajectories of the evolution of the relationship between social protest and scientific expertise



Trajectory 3
The protest becomes independent, discredits the scientific basis. Risk management and leading to stigmatisation

Trajectory 2
The protest relates to the organisation and expertise

Trajectory 1
Maintaining debate in the scientific field. The protest relates to lack of data

Source: Audition of O. Godard at CESE on 25/09/2012

Read the full text (in French) on www.lecese.fr

Graduation of risks and management principles

The diagram below shows a graduation of risks with characters known, unknown, certain or uncertain, generating distinct management principles.
In the event of a suspected risk, it appears that the precautionary principle is the most complex to implement in particular because of its prospective dimension: actions taken according to this principle evolve along with changing scientific knowledge.

Alain Feretti is consultant. Mayor of Grambois (84), president of the Departmental Union of Family Associations (UDAF) 04; and manager of the National Union of Family Associations (UNAF) He sits on the ESEC Section for Environment, on the Delegation investigating and evaluating public policies, where he represents the UNAF Group.

Contact:
aferetti@wanadoo.fr
+33(0)6.74.06.71.34