

Généalogie de l'évaluation économique en santé : l'application de l'*Operational Research* en santé (1946-1979)

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Context : The methods of health economic assessment developed in the English-speaking countries from the 1980s onwards, before spreading to European countries in the 2000s. These methods have led to high expectations on the part of public institutions. At the same time, economic assessments are criticised by academic communities, as are cost-benefit assessments more generally, to which they are related. It is common to explain such criticisms of economic assessment methods by their multidisciplinary nature. Indeed, these methods result from the meeting of two disciplines: welfare economics and clinical epidemiology.

Aim : The hypothesis set out here is that a third source discipline exists in the health economic assessment, namely “operations research” (OR). OR doesn't only complements the other two (economics and epidemiology). Instead, it is the discipline in which these two have met. OR therefore has an interface function between the two, and mediates them with respect to each other. This mediation would, in the first instance, lead to measurement practices which are out of step with the theoretical frameworks of economics and epidemiology. This mediation also limits the mutual understanding of economics and epidemiology and their recognition of a common epistemic framework.

Method : To explore this hypothesis, we draw on the method of archaeological knowledge, proposed by Michel Foucault (1966, 1969). We started by building a corpus using an incremental research strategy. We then studied the various statements within this corpus, in order to identify regularities and turning points both in semantics and concepts, so as to compare discourse “styles”.

Result: This method made it possible to identify the emergence of a “disciplinary matrix”, in the sense used by Thomas Kuhn (1969), with the publication of Morse and Kimball's work, and its gradual stabilisation between 1946-1979. This matrix was then adapted, as such, to the health field.