

TRACK 31. PRACTICING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN CONTROVERSIAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The perceived democratic deficit at national and EU levels is a much discussed and lamented policy problem of our times. Citizens, policy makers and social scientists often call for citizen participation for reasons of democratic legitimacy and effectiveness. Such calls for citizen participation have been particularly evident in science and technology policy areas where dramatic technological controversies have been prominent in the last 20 years (e.g. nuclear energy, BSE, genetically modified organisms, human embryonic stem cells).

In many countries but also at the EU level policy-making in this area witnessed the introduction of Participatory Technology Assessment procedures. In addition, the last decade also saw the rise of clinical, research and national ethics committees, which have been expected to help solve ethical dilemmas of modern science and technology. The “litmus test” of Participatory Technology Assessment procedures and ethics committees has been their impact on actual policy-making. But has PTA really kept its promises and increased the influence of citizen voices on policy-making? And: In what ways has the public voice or have values been represented in ethics committees? What in actual fact are the impacts of these bodies and the Participatory Technology Assessment procedures on political decision-making? What are the ways in which “impact” has been defined and demonstrated? How can we increase the impact of citizen participation on national and European levels and thus enhance citizens’ democratic ownership?

This thematic track invites papers which deal in a broad way with the question of how public engagement in controversial science and technology is and can be practiced in arrangements of Participatory Technology Assessment, ethics committees or similar fora. Papers should, e.g., address questions such as the following:

- What forms of participatory technology assessment and ethics committees do exist? What normative foundations have characterized their practices?
- Which voices are heard/included and which voices are silenced/excluded? What are the practices of inclusion/exclusion? In what ways are these practices able to create/channel public engagement?
- What is the role of stakeholder values (e.g., religious values) in public engagement activities?
- How have impacts on policy making (in international comparative perspective) of these practices been defined and demonstrated?
- What social dynamics have characterized interactions between different forms of expertise and between lay citizens and experts?
- What institutional setup and design are conducive to increase public engagements on questions of controversial science and technology? In what ways are national context/cultures important in this respect? Do these practices have a more general impact on how democracies deal with controversial science?

- What can we learn from democracy theory for thinking about Participatory Technology Assessment? Drawing from the experience of actual cases, what set(s) of criteria can we advance to analyse PTA? And: What can we learn for democracy theory from PTA?

Abstracts of no more than 500 words should be sent by email (following website instructions) by 2010 March 15th.

Convenors

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