

Governing by dialogue: Pre-emptive politics in the field of nanotechnology

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Agenda

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- What is “Dialogue” at all?
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Context – the NanoPol project

- started late 2008, scheduled until early 2011
- common project of the following institutions:
 - Institute of Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) / Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)
 - Institute of Technology Assessment (ITA) / Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna
 - TA-Swiss, Centre for Technology Assessment, Bern
 - Programme for Science Studies / Univ. Basel
 - [Institute for Communication Science (IFK) / U Muenster]
 - [Department of Media and Communication Studies / U Mannheim]
- 5 thematic working parties:
 1. History and actors
 2. Accompanying research
 3. Dialogue and participatory events
 4. Media resonance
 5. Regulation and governance

Dialogue and Governance in the Field of Nanotechnology

- massive increase of amount and variety of dialogue processes in the last decade
- widely seen as political instrument of “new governance” (UN 2008, CEC 2001, EC 2010)
- simultaneously, rise of nanotechnology as concept and sth. that has to be made “governable”
- due to earlier experiences (nuclear energy, genetic engineering) very early organisation of different “dialogues”
- „dialogues“ often used to anticipate public controversies (anticipatory risk management) – nanophobia phobia (Rip 2006)

What is “dialogue” at all?

- by conceptualisation of “dialogue” as political instrument weakening of traditional understanding of “dialogue” as conversation
- In current analysis focus on processes that are called “dialogue” by the organisers or aim at “governing by dialogue”
- i.e. NO evaluation and judgement of processes, but rather dismantling, analysis and reflection of structures of these processes

Dialogue as Infra-structure

- dialogues as communicative and material infra-structures that predetermine what can be said
- predefined structures (“dialogue formats”) raise expectations of protagonists that determine outcome of processes
- focus on three different levels:
 1. cognitive level (which topics are discussed, what is the outcome)
 2. social level (which protagonists are involved, what is the aim of the event)
 3. political level (how is the process linked to political institutions, how is the outcome fed into the political process)
- additionally, general description of the individual dialogue processes with regards to their architecture

Different Kinds of Dialogue Processes I

Stakeholder dialogues

- experts or persons with some kind of a mandate
- mostly organised by some regulatory body (ministry, agency)
- focusing on specific issues
- mostly of regulatory interest
- aiming at initiating decision-making processes and/or political processes

Different kinds of Dialogue Processes II

Participatory processes

- trying to integrate other than scientific knowledge, not expert-driven
- small group formats dominate
- information gathering process
- often connected to some on-going political or decision-making process (at least decision-preparing)
- unprejudiced, with open outcome

Different kinds of Dialogue Processes III

Information „dialogues“

- information transfer
- one-way process
- generalised topics („risks and chances“)
- political goal often connected to acceptance of technology or the like
- not connected to a political decision-making process
- can be misused for mere self-manifestation and image building of an institution/organisation (semantic or „pseudo“-dialogues)
- lack of continuity

Empirical Setting – Case Studies and Comparison

- 3 countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) - comparative analysis
- 3 different types of dialogue processes
- case studies (3 x 3)
- stakeholder processes: Nanotechnology platform (A), NanoDialog (GE), NanoConvention (CH)
- participatory processes: Fokusgruppen NanoCare (GE), PubliFocus (CH), not yet carried out (A)
- information „dialogues“: Risiko:dialog Nano (A), Bürgerdialoge NanoCare (D), ??? (CH)

Exemplary Analysis – Stakeholder Dialogues I

General remarks – architecture

- usually, plenary sessions at the beginning and various workshops in the second part of the event
- plenary sessions to inform, but also to synchronise the state of the discussion among the participants; typical „speaker – audience“ construction
- parallel workshops less formal, to contextualise specific topics with regards to national structures
- change from serial lecturing to parallel discussions

Exemplary Analysis – Stakeholder Dialogues II

Cognitive level

- mostly, participants with prior knowledge about NT
- topics of plenary talks (loosely) corresponding with workshop topics
- similar topics for all three events:
 - synthetic nanoparticles and their applications
 - consequences for health and environment
 - occupational health and safety
 - risk communication and management
- results often published in documentary stating next steps and outcomes with regards to content

Exemplary Analysis – Stakeholder Dialogues III

Social level

- from plenary sessions to workshops transition from
 - unspecified (mass) audience to smaller more specified community
 - anonymous participants to (scientific) experts or (policital) representatives
 - listening to one speaker to face-to-face communication between experts
- organisations get „face“ and position and (at least temporarily) become coordination units

Exemplary Analysis – Stakeholder Dialogues IV

Political level

- direct connection to (future) decision-making processes
- main aim: political coordination and steering function
- in GE and A direct influence of stakeholder dialogues: initiation of NanoKommission (GE) and NanoAktionsplan (A); in CH indirect influence: agenda setting in national context
- delegation of responsibilities for the (future) process of governing NT to political and research organisations

Summary and Outlook – Focus of Future Analysis

- NT so far more a concept than (material) reality - politics of talk (Irwin 2006)
 - pre-emptive politics are set up, that try to anticipate aspects of future (political and public) debate
 - a variety of organisations is brought into the “dialogue” process at a very early stage of technology development and governance and thus incorporated into the decision-preparing/-making process before having formulated their own (potentially critical) positions
- different forms of dialogues make NT (as EST) governable

Thank you!

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Dialogue as infra-structure – an analogy

- The infrastructure of a dialogue structures the modes of **speaking and listening**
- Conceptual analogy: The architecture of the panopticon structures the modes of **seeing and being seen** (Foucault's analysis of panopticon)



- One observer – many prisoners.
- Prisoners can't see the observer.
- Implication: Prisoners *behave* as if they are watched all the time.



- One speaker – many listeners.
- Speaker can talk **to**, but not talk **with** the audience. Listeners **cannot talk** to each other.
- Implication: Speaker is structurally forced to **inform** (or entertain) the audience.