

Third Generation Deliberative Processes on Nano Technology

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Background

The 7th FP NANOPLAT project reviewed initiatives involving citizens and/or stakeholders in participatory exercises or “deliberative processes” on the emerging nanotechnologies.

More than 60 processes, undertaken in Europe and abroad (mainly in the USA) were registered, 10-12 were selected for closer analysis

Main findings were presented in the book Strandbakken et. al eds. (2013): *Consumers and Nanotechnology. Deliberative Processes and Methodologies*

«Generations»

We identified a pattern and a direction in the development of nano deliberations over time:

- Increased resources
- More specific tasks and in how they were situated politically.
- Differences in the intensity of the deliberations (number of participants/length of the process)
- We identified two “generations” of deliberations. The first was addressing general ethical, political and social aspects of nanotechnology and the role of science in modern society.

«Generations» cont.

- The Danish Citizens' Nano Conference 2004 was a one-day event, organized by the Danish Board of Technology with 29 citizens from the Copenhagen area
- The Ile-de-France process from 2006 to 2007 had 16 participants, providing input to the science policy of the region. The process lasted for four months, with training weekends, a public debate and a final session to prepare a set of policy recommendations. In addition, the participants did a lot of reading homework

First and second generations

- These two processes; the Danish one from 2004, and the French regional one from 2007, became – in NANOPLAT language – the paradigmatic 1st and 2nd generations in our analysis.
- *“One should bear in mind that the differences between generations are about main tendencies and not clear-cut definitions. Obviously, the generational perspective is applied after the events” (Stø et. al, 2013)*

The characteristics of a second generation-deliberation, as opposed to a first

- Second generation deliberations had more specific themes/questions
- More resources were employed, like time and access to expertise,
- Clearer links to political processes (as something more specific than providing input to “someone might read me”-reports to the parliament).

What challenges remained?

- First, there was a problem connected to a replication of results, and the fear that more processes would only reveal 'more of the same'
- Second, the fear that deliberations would raise public expectations, or the expectations of the participants, expectations that would not be met by the political bodies.
- Third, there was a democratic problem if decision making in effect was moved from elected bodies to non-representative ones.

3Rd Generation Deliberations:

- Our ideas for a next step; from the second to a third generation, was to design processes that meet these remaining challenges.
- The following is based on our experience with arranging a 3rd Gen Deliberation over two days in June 2014
- Our main focus in the exercise, on nanotechnology and Human Enhancement, was to avoid replication of previous results.

Replication of results. New insights?

We tried to create a setting where the potential for new outcomes was increased, relying on three measures:

- First, the idea that more specific themes and questions might provoke some unexpected responses
- Second, ambitious workshops: the content and design of the material and posters, the quality of presentations, time and space for debates etc.
- Finally, we introduced elements of workshop democracy, where participants decided on what themes to highlight and to choose between suggested presentations on the chosen themes.

Rising expectations

- Citizens and/or stakeholders should enter the process with a realistic assessment of its potential effects on policy
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- So, the political framing of the deliberation should be clear from the start. Is it input to political processes, are we aiming for increasing the reflexivity of key stakeholders (or something else)?
- We do not want to see participants frustrated by a lack of action in the aftermath of an interesting event that promised to have wider ranging effects

The relation to representative democracy

Even more important is the question of democratic legitimacy:

- Small exercises in participatory democracy might be used by authorities to by-pass representative democracy.
- A proper use of citizens' or stakeholder deliberations is to produce input, ideas and suggestions for the representative political system to decide and legislate on.
- Legitimate decision-making should remain there

However..

As mentioned, we were mainly interested in the problems of replication of responses and results

We need to reflect on what degree of novelty, originality and “newness” we are entitled to expect. Researchers have been reading, writing and practicing in this field for a number of years, and know what kinds of ideas that have come forth in previous exercises

We know when the group is touching on original views, and when it is just replicating the standard approaches.

Newness?

It is not realistic to expect a group of stakeholders to come up with a set of **never before thought of ideas for future science policy and for medical ethics.**

We were not planning a revolution; we were trying to create a fruitful setting for discussing the interface between medical science and technology and society; society represented by a group of central stakeholders, where we hoped to observe some incremental development of positions, statements and worries.

Some, rather original (?) results:

(from the group's statement): For medicine, a paradox of development was presented. Publicly financed Norwegian research is strictly regulated and oriented at specific cures and treatments. The element of free and creative research is very small.

Criteria for approval of a new drug are so strict with respect to animal testing, informed patient consensus, reporting to the Norwegian Data Inspectorate etc. that much potentially important and groundbreaking research is stopped in advance.

However, it is not very tempting to reduce the ethical requirements.

Some, rather original (?) results 2:

Commercial medical research, or drug development, on the other hand, tends to cater only for the large groups of patients, because “minority medicine” does not have a potential market large enough to justify the enormous investments. The question: how many suffers from this disease or problem becomes crucial.

These two constraints on public and commercial science/product development respectively, tend to qualify the common statement that technology will develop anyway. They lead to too “managed” research, politically or commercially.

We suffer from too little “risk taking” research, free research and surprising innovations, which is strange, since Norway could afford to do otherwise.

Meta comment on novelty

At the end of the first workshop, participants mentioned the problem that there probably was a bit too much agreement/consensus in the group; that they got stuck in the common 'positive but worried' position. Because of that, they asked to get some input from enthusiastic trans-humanists, just to widen their own perspectives.

We found this reflexivity to be interesting and impressive

Further, replication is not necessarily a failure. Participants must be allowed to shape their own perspective, and to introduce them into settings where they are new (NGOs, hearings, political parties etc.).

Enough words – let us
deliberate!

Thank you for your attention!