

Editorial

The new role(s) of social sciences

Since the very beginning, social sciences have been dedicated to shaping or even changing society. In recent decades, many social scientists were engaged in societal and political matters, e.g. in the debates on nuclear energy, genetics, or climate change. They acted as experts, as consultants, as analysts, as concerned scientists, and sometimes even as interpreters of time or as prophets.

However, social scientists have become practical in other respect: they organize and manage participatory processes, in which experts and lay-people – and social scientists, too – negotiate contestable issues, such as the release of genetically modified organisms, or develop scenarios of future technologies, e.g. in the case of nanotechnology.

The current issue has been prepared by the guest editors Priska Gisler and Silke Schicktanz. It focuses on the roles social scientists should, might or do assume in science policy making processes. In their introduction to the issue, Priska Gisler and Silke Schicktanz give an overview over case studies and analyses concerning the question of how social scientists are involved in science policy making. They point to several emerging roles such as the *organizer* of participatory procedures, the *moderator*, the *translator*, the *expert*, the *evaluator*, or the *commentator*.

Gabriele Abels provides in her contribution “Organizer, observer and participant. What role for social scientists in different pTA models?” an overview of seven different types of participatory technology assessment, depending on the number and heterogeneity of participants.

Maud Radstake, Annemiek Nelis, Eefje van den Heuvel-Vromans, and Koen Dortmans (“Mediating online DNA-Dialogues. From public engagement to interventionist research”) present their experiences with novel forms of dialogues between lay-people and experts via online discussion boards.

We wish to thank Priska Gisler and Silke Schicktanz for initiating and organizing this issue on a topic of considerable interest to social scientists working in the field of science, technology, and innovation studies.

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