

Engaging citizens in regulatory science

Insights from the field of risk assessment

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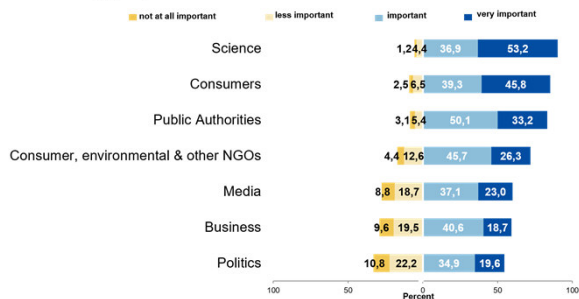
While demands for greater engagement of citizens in science have been growing everywhere, they have been particularly strong in fields where science builds the base for policy making. This also holds for the field of "regulatory science", where science is involved in developing new approaches to assess the safety, efficacy and quality of regulated products (Dendler & Boel, 2020; Moghissi et al., 2017). This poster presents empirical reactions to a potential greater participatory opening of the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR), a prominent regulatory scientific organisation in the field of risk assessment. We identify a general support for greater engagement, especially concerning the consumer. Focussing on the method of consumer conferences, we also show challenges in enacting these demands. In particular, we illustrate difficulties in ensuring inclusive input from across society and facilitating events in a way that contesting demands can appropriately be balanced.

Literature:

Dendler, L., & Böel, G.-F. (2020). Increasing Engagement in Regulatory Science: Reflections from the Field of Risk Assessment. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243920944499>.
 Moghissi et al. (2017). Innovation in Regulatory Science: Translational Regulatory Science based on Lessons Learned from Clinical Translational Science. *Journal of Translational Science*3(6): 1-6

Empirical Reactions to Participatory Opening of the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

Public Survey Responses: How important do you consider the engagement of the following groups in the work of BfR?



In percent of all those that provided a response | Science n=950, consumers n=953, public authorities n=942, NGOs n=935, media n=953, business=945, politics n=947 | Divergent to 100 ± answer "partly" Source: Götte et al. (2017)

Insights from Professional Expert Interviews

- What is the „right“ identification and selection of stakeholders (pragmatic vs. strategic vs. normative selection)?
- How to avoid stakeholder fatigue?
- How to engage heterogeneous stakeholders with different capacities and/or interests?
- How much decision making power should be attributed, especially in the scientific context?

„...if the societal development is modern governance [...] – we do not believe that based on our experience, [...] You likely have in every meeting representatives from industry that have the ability to take the time and prepare with own studies and research. NGOs will not be able to do that [...] We just have an asymmetry in weapons“ (Interview NGO, translated).

“At BfR, which has to formulate scientific expertise, you can request information and comments but in the end BfR has to decide“ (Interview corporate organisation, translated).

“...it has to be integrated into decision making processes“ (Interview NGO, translated).

Conclusions

- Engagement as an overall societal trend.
- In the case of BfR, demands for greater engagement especially in terms of consumers.

But:

- Demands are not coherent.
- Controversies around the “right” selection of stakeholders, the engagement of heterogenous stakeholders, potential stakeholder fatigue and the distribution of decision power, especially in science.
- Need for well supported participatory opening with preparations for its unavoidable challenges and conflicts.

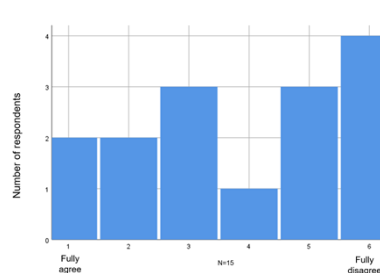
Engagement through Consensus Conferences

A longstanding method to engage citizens in scientific endeavors that are both policy-relevant and complex are consensus conferences. Especially within contested fields of emerging technologies, such as genetic engineering, consensus conferences have become an established tool to engage citizens in the science-policy interface.

BfR Consumer Conference on Genome Editing in the fields of Nutrition & Human Health:



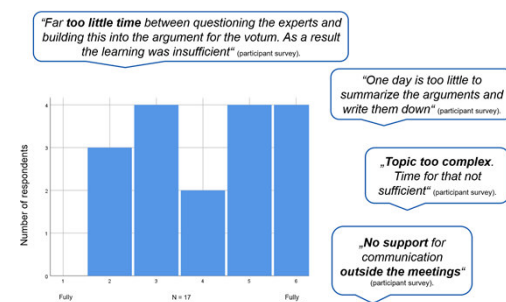
Participant Survey Responses: The consumer vote represents the attitudes of German consumers towards genome editing?



“It mainly attracted people that are interested in science and health. I was missing, so to say, the typical benefits receiver that is against everything“ (participant interview).

“I don't think there were any participants with migration background?“ (participant interview).

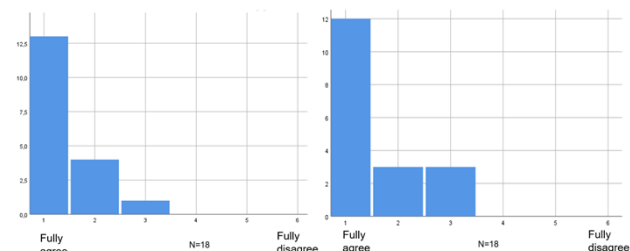
Participant Survey Responses: The organisation of the conference was not effective?



Participant Survey Responses:

I learned something about genome editing

I could imagine to participate in future consensus conference or other citizen engagement formats



Conclusions

- Input legitimacy as a challenge especially for selected deliberation
- Topic and time management as a challenge
- Need to support participants throughout the process potentially through new (online) approaches

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