

International Conference:
Governing Futures. Imagining, Negotiating & Taming Emerging Technosciences
Organizers: Department of Social Studies of Science, University of Vienna

**Monitoring and Preventing:
On the role of 'socio-scientific imaginaries' in the co-production of science and society.**

Thomas Völker (*)

In recent years authors more or less closely connected to the so-called sociology of expectations have pointed out the importance of future-related rhetoric in processes of establishing new technologies and the emergence and stabilization of (mostly techno-)scientific fields. Statements about possible futures thereby are not regarded as mere fantasies. Rather their performative properties are highlighted, meaning that future-related statements might lead to positioning of different actors and the articulation of particular research or development agendas. Collective imagination – i.e. the production and stabilization of ideas about a particular future state of affairs - therefore is regarded as a powerful cultural resource in the constant (re-)production of social order.

While most contributions that emanate from the sociology of expectations deal with technologies or techno-scientific developments, I will look at a field where knowledge production itself is at stake. Transdisciplinarity is a notion frequently used to describe attempts of 'opening up' or 'democratizing' knowledge production. Situated within the debate on changing relations between science and society - captured with notions such as 'mode 2' or 'post-normal science'- transdisciplinary knowledge production has been already anchored in several research programs.

For my presentation I will use Sheila Jasanoff's concept of 'socio-technical imaginaries' to look at policy documents of an Austrian research funding program with the explicit goal to foster transdisciplinary knowledge production in sustainability research. The concept of 'socio-technical imaginaries' directs attention to the role of imaginative resources in the co-production of scientific and social orders. Its explanatory power lies in the analysis of processes through which some orderings are co-produced instead of others.

I will slightly re-coin Jasanoff's notion and use it as 'socio-scientific imaginaries'. Using this notion I aim at directing attention to imaginations of good and attainable futures of society and how these imagined futures shall be encompassed through specific relations of science and society and a particular kind of knowledge.

With the notion of 'socio-scientific imaginaries' I thus put knowledge at the center of interest as ideas about knowledge are intensely discussed in current debates on changes of knowledge production. Drawing on cultural imaginative resources the distribution of epistemic authority is discussed as well as questions like who can be regarded as knowledgeable actor, who are possible users and beneficiaries of particular knowledge and what are acceptable goals and purposes of knowledge production.

In my presentation I will describe the socio-scientific imaginaries of a particular research program in Austria where a particular relation of science and society and along with that a particular idea of knowledge production is employed in order to realize a specific envisioned future state of society. Put differently I will look at transdisciplinary sustainability research policy as a site where imaginations about the future of society become deeply entangled with a specific idea of knowledge production and knowledge itself.

(*) Department of Social Studies of Science
University of Vienna
Thomas.voelker@univie.ac.at