



Five European citizens meetings

The citizens meetings were conducted as the first step of the RECIPES co-creation process. The goal of the meetings was to incorporate citizens' views, concerns and messages into the project and to prepare the ground for the later involvement of stakeholders, during the next steps of the project.

To achieve this, a diversified sample of the population, in five countries, was invited to attend the citizen meetings.

Two of the major findings in the five citizens meetings was that participants did not see precaution and innovation as being in contradiction with each other and that the precautionary principle was almost universally recognised as an appropriate and effective tool to regulate uncertainties arising from development of technologies.

Furthermore, it was observed that participants seemed to look differently to technology and innovation in general as opposed to specific cases. Technology and innovation in general were characterized as an unstoppable force that was impossible to hold back by regulation. However, this conviction was much less present when people got into details about precaution in relation to specific cases, such as e.g. new medicine and GMOs. The complexity of the more general terms technology and innovation vs. concrete and specific cases fostered arguments for assessing innovation and technology case-by-case and to differentiate precautionary measures according their societal and environmental value.

"Even though considerable concerns towards innovation were articulated, the participants did not seem overly pessimistic. They were able to cite a variety of dilemmas, worst case scenarios and problems but did not seem angry or desperate about technology".

Ethical, moral and social consequences clearly mattered a great deal to the participants in the five citizens meetings and they predominantly argued that these matters should be included when assessing whether or not to invoke the precautionary principle.

A general view was that stakeholders and citizens should be widely involved and engaged in the process when applying the precautionary principle:

"Everybody who has a stake should have a voice".

At the same time, the complexity and time-consumption of the engagement process should be considered on a case-to-case basis in relation to the potential impacts and balanced on the scale of risks and gains.

The importance of involving institutions with scientific knowledge and democratic responsibilities, independent from external interests and with high transparency often surfaced during the discussions. Distrust, or at least scepticism towards the neutrality of institutions not complying with the above (especially politicians and companies) were often expressed in relation to technology, power and economic interests.

Finally, the overall impression was that the participants seemed little informed about the governance towards technologies and uncertainties; how these risks have or have not been handled and by whom.

Discussion points

The size of the groups and the quality of the data that was collected does not warrant us to make very firm conclusions about what citizens in general think about precaution and innovation in the five countries where the citizens meetings were held. But, it provides an insight to the diversity of arguments in the discussions. Moreover, it gave us new insights into relevant topics, examples and some common thoughts among citizens that are useful to take into account for the rest of the project.

Besides the topics mentioned in the information material, people also talked about the dangers of the impact of data-collection of tech-giants, pulse-fishing, medical prostheses, Wi-Fi, nuclear energy, plastics, electromagnetic fields, vaccination, cloning etc.

Authors

Desislava Asenova, Marko Hajdinjak and Zoya Damianova, ARC FUND bulgaria

Giovanna Declich and Federico Marta, K&I srls Italy

Laura Elisabet Drivdal, Madeleine Børs Mitgaard, and Jeroen van der Sluijs. Bergen University Norway

Tijs Sikma and Petra Verhoef, Rathenau institute The Netherlands

Søren Gram and Aske Palsberg, The Danish Board of Technology foundation Denmark

Date 21 October 2019

Contact information:
Aske Palsberg - Aspa@tekno.dk