CO-CREATION: A CHALLENGING PROCESS

IN BRIEF

- Co-creation allows for proactive and creative inclusion of different perspectives by different stakeholders. They bring together different knowledge to promote commitment and a sense of responsibility.
- Competing target options are often diverse or contradicting (e.g. democratisation or concrete product development). This requires prioritisation and precise positioning of the respective co-creation process.
- Participation of citizens, consumers, and experts increases the effectiveness of the process; however, additional resources are needed to help facilitate this challenging process.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Currently, diversity forms part of society's identity. Gender roles and gender identities, for example, have a decisive influence on our social behaviour: they influence our risk-taking, decision-making or our communication behaviour. Belonging to certain social classes, professional groups or subcultures also affects our behaviour, interests, and visions.

Taking diversity into account in participatory processes (i.e. processes with participation of various actors), escpecially those where technology is concerned, is challenging. The balancing of social identities does not come about "by itself" or solely through positive discrimination. Large parts of society are potentially discriminated against because of a limited understanding of equality. This is especially true in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) field of research where core values and predispositions are mostly based on a traditional concept of gender. Responsible Research and Innovation

(RRI) as a concept embraces a holistic-integrated approach in which the dimensions of gender and equality play a significant role.

In the EU project GoNano, citizens and representatives from research and industry developed visions for nanotechnologies in the spirit of RRI.
Special consideration was given to aspects of diversity during the selection of participants. These visions can

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Very different perspectives find their way into the co-creation process.

now be actively integrated into existing innovation and governance processes, thus having a broad impact. The practical implementation of RRI requires that different stakeholder groups come together in discursive participation formats to actively participate in innovation processes. The objectives can vary: from democratisation to industrial product development. To avoid the potential for misunderstanding and conflict, co-creation requires communication of respective priorities at the very beginning of the cooperation. It is essential to clarify stakeholders' different interests, roles, capacities, and expectations at every step of the process. Equal and respectful communication ensures that reservations or information gaps regarding the method or content of a co-creation process around nanotechnologies are addressed in a aconstructive manner.

BASIC DATA

Project title: GoNano – Governing nanotechnologies through societal engagement
Project team: ITA: U. Bechtold, D. Fuchs, V. Borrmann (in an international consortium)
Duration: 09/2017 – 12/2020
Funded by: EU-Horizon 2020
Website: gonano-project.eu

KEY RESULTS

GoNano aimed at bridging innovative product development and democratisation whilst bringing together the positions and visions of different stakeholder groups. Transparency was central in motivating citizens, scientists, and stakeholders to stay on board during a long and complex process. Scientists and stakeholders need to be aware of the positive impact this process has on their work.
In addition, it must be clear to all participants why the process is taking place in this very constellation and what added value is to be generated as a result.
To support this, results were made accessible to all stakeholder groups.

Credit: GoNano project

Different interests are made visible.

The participants' different interests, roles, capacities, and expectations were clearly communicated at the beginning and throughout the process. At each subsequent step of the process, questions and concerns were consciously addressed. As a result, doubts or significant information gaps regarding the method could be addressed in a constructive way, promoting the understanding of nanotechnologies through equal and respectful communication.

Specific expertise and everyday knowledge must be recognised and integrated to the same extent. For communication to work in the process and produce relevant, creative, and inclusive results, the organisers needed a lot of time, space, technical skills, commitment, and informative orientation. On a systemic level, neither academia nor smaller businesses are currently equipped with the necessary resources for open and long-term co-creation processes.

WHAT TO DO?

Successful co-creation requires a firm positioning of policymakers, science, and industry to design or shape innovation responsibly and inclusively.

- **Inclusion:** The goal of RRI is to proactively facilitate innovation through broad participation. From a technology assessment perspective, it is essential to strengthen and prioritise deliberative democratisation in co-creation processes.
- **Bridge-building:** RRI is tasked with raising questions and with proactively steering cooperation between different actors in the research and innovation agenda. Product development does not endeavour to achieve the same. Moreover, it represents a valid space for action and responsibility addressed by RRI, where ethics must be recognised as a driver for innovation, and not be used as an afterthought tool for evaluation.
- **Political commitment:** The recognition of complex collective responsibility, also by research policy, entails proactive agreement on values and moral concepts in which innovation can occur.
To counteract overly selective participation, more resources and better awareness of the added value of co-creation are needed.
- **Transparency and communication:** It is essential for all stakeholders to recognise the added value of better, more creative outcomes through collaboration. This is facilitated by making all results accessible and by openly communicating different goals and expectations

FURTHER READING

Bechtold, U., Fuchs, D. & Borrmann, V. (2020). Collection of the GoNano policy and industry briefs. Suggestions for realizing RRI conditions in nanotechnology research and innovation, GoNano Deliverable no. 5.5, *gonano-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/GoNano-D5.5.pdf*

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