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Edited by Giuseppe Pellegrini and Chiara Piccolo

Science, Society and Innovation

Participatory and Deliberative Practices in Techno-Scientific Changes

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL SCIENCE

Summary

In modern societies, rapid scientific and technological change is deeply intertwined with human action, creating demand for public engagement to ensure democratic legitimacy and social robustness. Innovation is a complex, multidirectional process shaped by social, cultural, and political factors. This book examines citizen engagement in science and technology, asking how much room exists for it, what forms of democracy support it, what practices exist, and what impacts they have. Using case studies from Europe, Chile, and India, the book explores participatory and deliberative processes—such as citizens' assemblies, energy transition initiatives, and AI governance—arguing that traditional representative democracy is insufficient for governing technoscientific challenges. It highlights the potential of these practices to foster mutual learning, reflexivity, and socially robust innovation. Key pillars include actors, communication processes, and evaluative dimensions. Case studies reveal both strengths (e.g., enhanced relevance, knowledge democratization) and weaknesses (e.g., power imbalances, tokenism). The book serves as a practical guide to distinguishing genuine participation from opportunistic use, offering conditions for effectiveness such as resources, trust, and recognizing citizens as active co-creators. Ultimately, it aims to provide a nuanced overview of strategies, outcomes, and contradictions in this evolving field.

About the editors

Giuseppe Pellegrini is Senior Lecturer in Science, Innovation and Technology at the University of Trento, Italy, and President of Observa Science in Society. His research focuses on the relationship between science, technology, and society, with particular attention to public engagement, science communication, and participatory processes in techno-scientific contexts. Combining qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches, he has developed extensive expertise in studying how citizens and experts interact in shaping scientific and technological developments. He currently leads the Italian research team of the European project HEREDITARY, which investigates relationships between experts and citizens in the field of neurodegenerative diseases. He is also a member of the scientific committee of APENET, the Italian network of universities for public engagement, and of the Public Communication on Science and Technology network.

Chiara Piccolo is Researcher at the Department of Mathematics, Computer Science and Physics at the University of Udine, Italy. She holds a PhD in Social Sciences and a Master's degree in Social Psychology. Her research combines science and technology studies, participatory processes, and communication studies, with applications to public health, emergencies, environmental risks, and social innovation. She has participated in several national and international research projects and is currently involved in the Horizon project SonarCities, focusing on emergency management and vulnerable populations. Her interdisciplinary expertise is further enriched by teaching activities in Visual Communication and Society, and Ethics and Innovation.

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