Current debates on engaging science and society

Ulrike Felt

Department of Social Studies of Science, University of Vienna

ulrike.felt@univie.ac.at

http://sciencestudies.univie.ac.at

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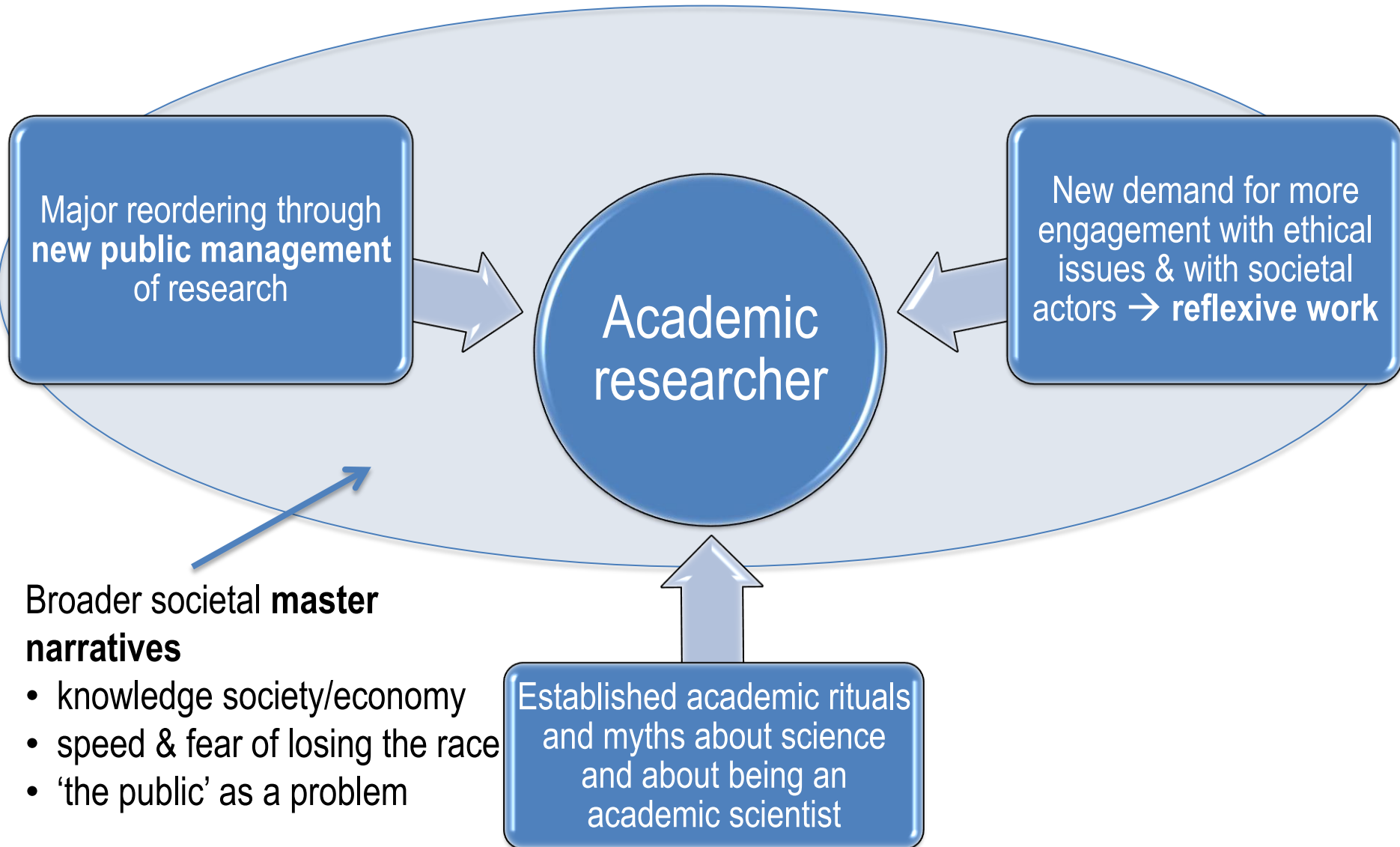
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Points of Departure

- Over the past two decades issues concerning the relation of science and society have gradually become key-issues on the policy agenda in many European countries – yet with different formats and intensity – as well as on the European level

- Strong believe that the future of Europe and its member states can be shaped through allowing a continuous flow S&T innovations to be happen → aim creation of an innovation-friendly climate is seen as of key-importance + recruiting the next generation of researchers

- Broader framing narratives:
  - fierce competition (expressed through notions such as the "global race" and of "lagging behind")
  - a pressure to act quickly „before it is too late"
  - public/citizens are „the problem" potentially hindering developments or lacking interest in science and technology

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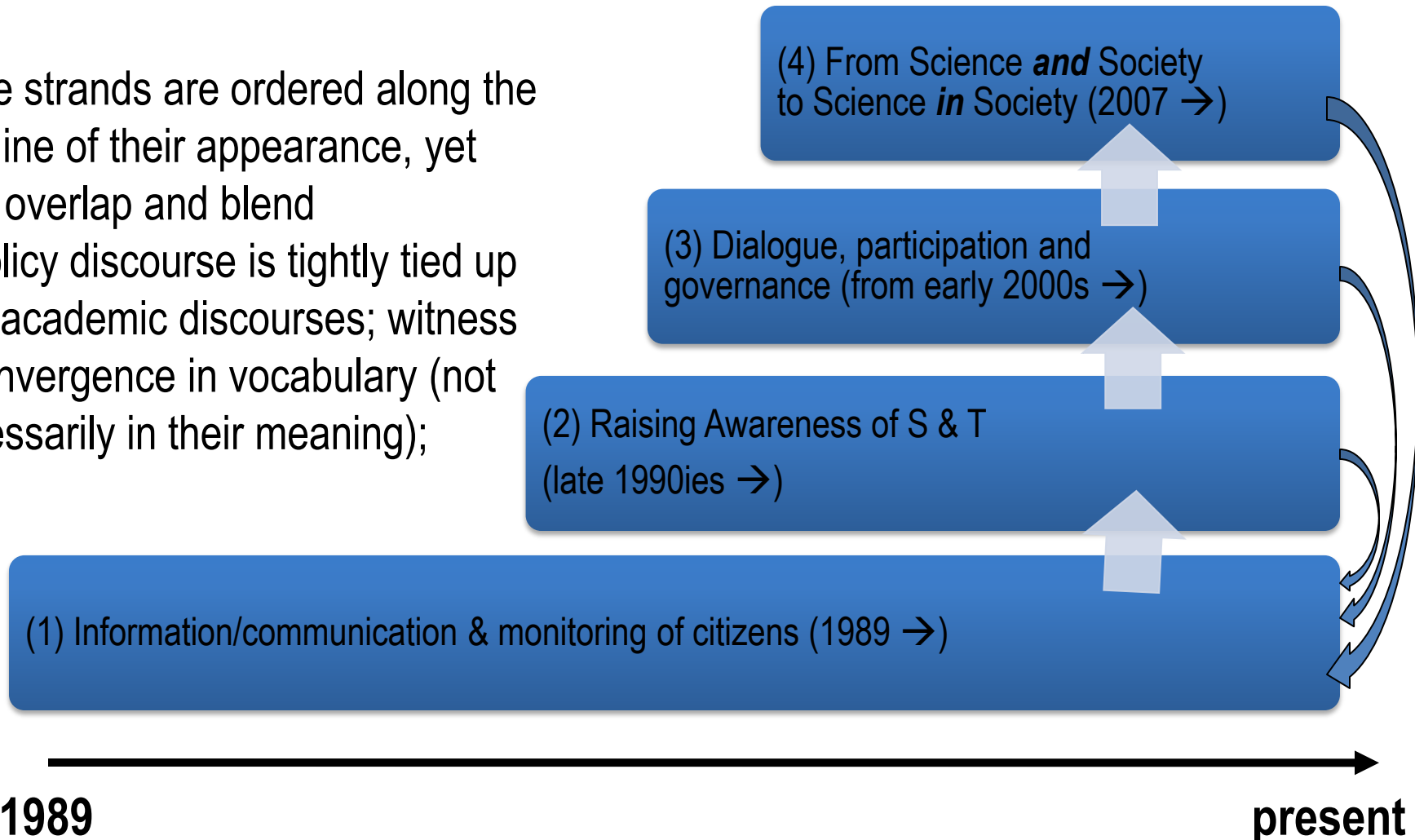wien

Points of Departure

- Although one can observe a certain discursive convergence, in the European context we are nevertheless confronted with
  - a broad variety of traditions in positioning science and technology in the public space
  - very diverse and historically grounded ways of doing science and technology policy is done
  - large diversity in the roles S&T play in creating national identity
  - important variations in the educational systems
  - different ways of tying into/relating to the idea of a common Europe

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Mapping out the ‚problem'

Academic researcher

Major reordering through **new public management** of research

New demand for more engagement with ethical issues & with societal actors → **reflexive work**

Established academic rituals and myths about science and about being an academic scientist

Broader societal **master narratives**
- knowledge society/economy
- speed & fear of losing the race
- 'the public' as a problem

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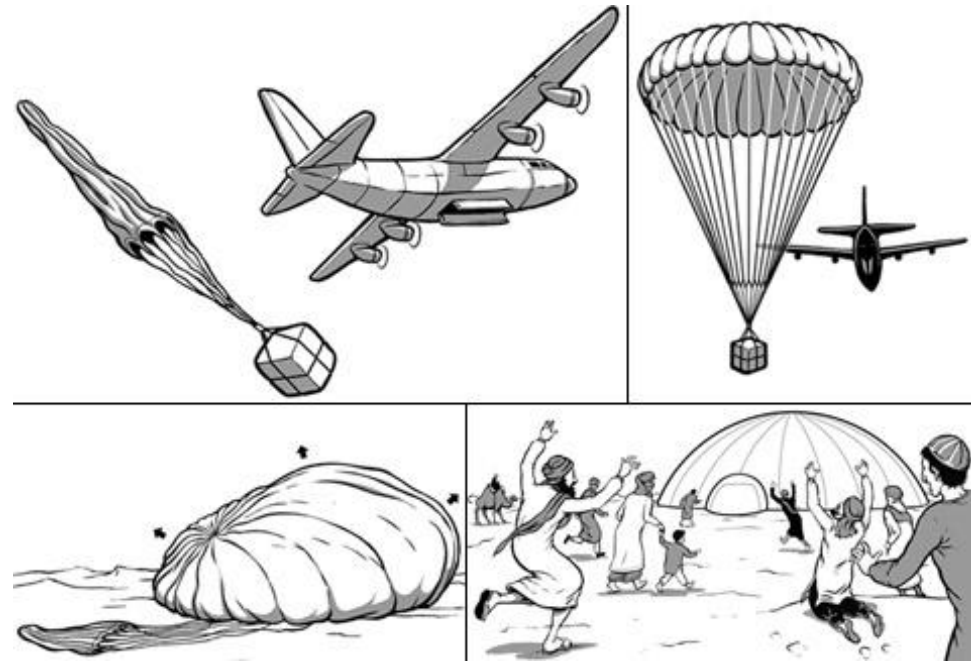# Four strands in the EU policy discourse on science-society issue

- the strands are ordered along the timeline of their appearance, yet they overlap and blend
- policy discourse is tightly tied up with academic discourses; witness a convergence in vocabulary (not necessarily in their meaning);

(4) From Science **and** Society to Science **in** Society (2007 →)

(3) Dialogue, participation and governance (from early 2000s →)

(2) Raising Awareness of S & T (late 1990ies →)

(1) Information/communication & monitoring of citizens (1989 →)

1989

present

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State of the Art in *Science & Society* Issues

✓ Move from PUS(H) → PES → PES + broadening the issue

✓ International/European Activities

- Survey of public knowledge and attitudes towards S&T (see recent US debates of the National Science Board)

- Diversification of communication formats & PR activities

- Selected participatory exercises with varying outcomes

- ELSA/ELSI research funding programmes in a number of member states; yet often only in rather narrowly targeted areas (Bio; Nano; …)

- Framework Programmes (Governance, S&S; SiS)

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Some criticism raised

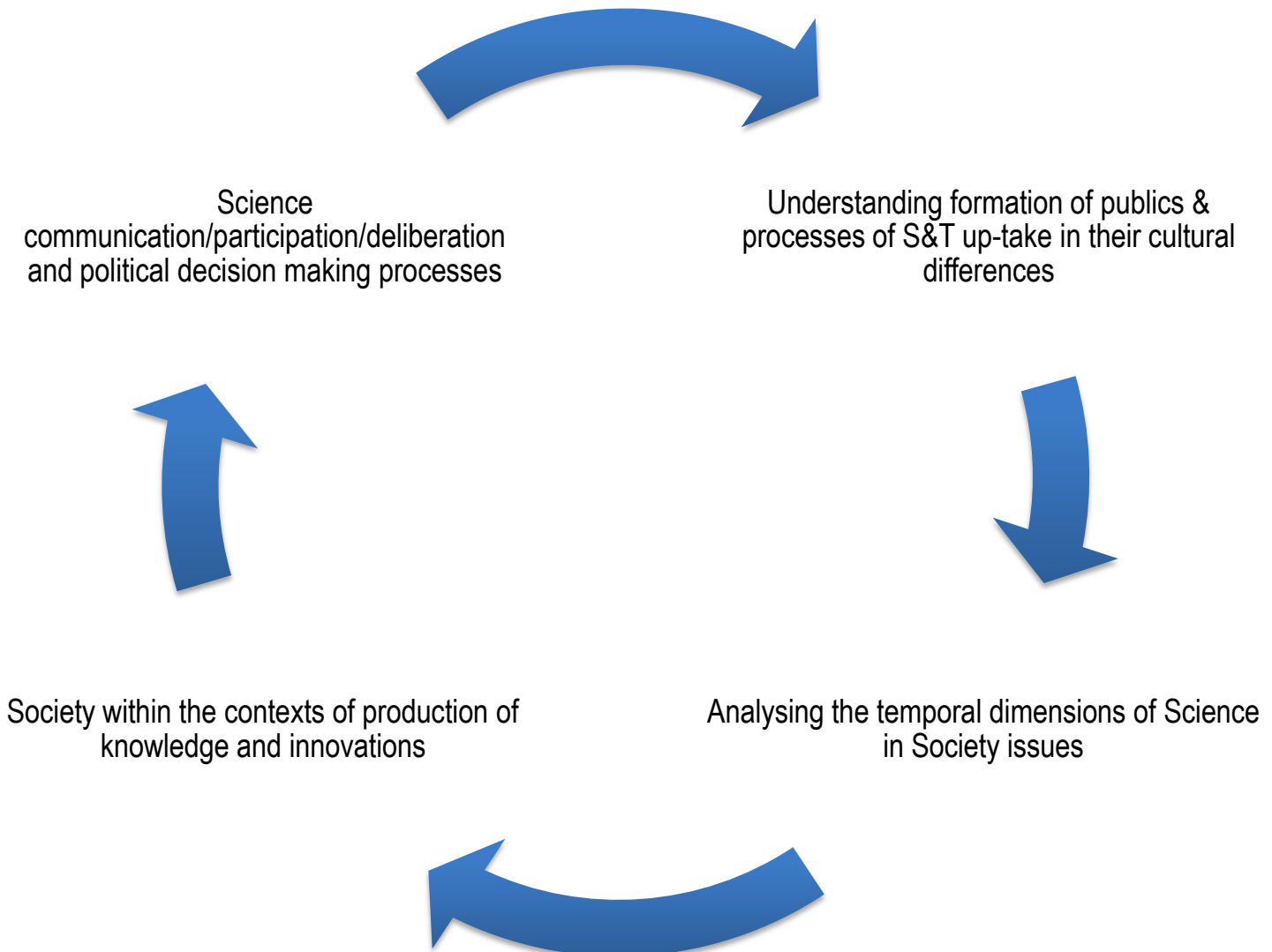

The pneumatic parlament, Sloterdijk

- ✓ much of the funding is purely action driven ("improvement" without necessary understanding how interaction works); participation & dialogue by the book (experts of community ?); lack of sensitivity for specific cultural contexts

- ✓ increase in quantity in communication, but little qualitative knowledge about processes; limits of involving publics

- ✓ The notion of understanding is still silently equalised with being supportive to S&T and not taken in its meaning of reaching "mutual agreement" → investment into communication is often understood as insurance to have less critical debate

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Some criticism raised

- ✓ publics are often simply taken as given and their construction through these processes is not acknowledged;

- ✓ Clear contradiction between research performed in the public space and research realities: fun, curiosity and openness vs. highly competitive, normative and following strict New Public Management ideals of efficiency

- ✓ growing "ethisisation" of research (more ethical reviews, ethics councils, …) while at the same time the issue of responsibility is largely replaced by simple structures of accountability

- ✓ Clearly pre-framed issues with limited possibility of "thinking outside the box"

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Challenges for future research

Science communication/participation/deliberation and political decision making processes

Understanding formation of publics & processes of S&T up-take in their cultural differences

Society within the contexts of production of knowledge and innovations

Analysing the temporal dimensions of Science in Society issues

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(1) Understanding formation of publics & processes of S&T up-take in their cultural differences

✓ Cultural differences within Europe concerning science-society relationships: move beyond the doing SiS towards understanding the more fine-grained mechanisms at work in communication, dialogue and interaction processes

- formation processes of publics
- Power differentials/Deliberative scepticism
- Relations political cultures/science up-take; what are the broader cultural resources used to assess S&T and make choices; question of the role of nation states

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- ✓ the "values question": beyond classical debates on ethics (investigate the responsibility/accountability relationship); challenge of plurality in contemporary societies - multicultural societies and their challenges towards socio-technical innovations

- ✓ Spaces of Participation/Deliberation/Dialogue & their architectures
  - Analysis of different models (stakeholder vs. public)/correlation to issues
  - Cultural plurality: in-/exclusiveness of formats towards segments of society
  - Scaling of deliberative efforts: Moving beyond single cases; beyond simple multiplication
  - New media and their role in positioning work of citizens
  - Output orientation vs process orientation (problem of "consensuing")
  - Issue construction/Framing: addresses the question where/when participation starts

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(2) Science communication/participation/deliberation and political decision making processes

- ✓ Understanding the role of technoscientific projects in "local" forms of identity building (regional, national, ….); e.g. socio-technical imaginaries and civic epistemologies (ways of knowing together in a political context)

- ✓ What are the recognisable architectures of participation in a political space? How does deliberation and political decision making relate to each other?

- ✓ Reflect changes in the forms and formats of making technoscientific choices (e.g. convergence and divergence in different political contexts)

- ✓ Consider the more tacit forms of governance

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(3) Society within the production of knowledge and innovations

✓ From risk governance to innovation governance

- Changing innovation processes – what could that mean? How do existing examples of open innovation function? What would be necessary frameworks to allow for different forms of innovation? Who could be involved and when, ….?

✓ Impact of SiS issues on the scientific community

- Feedback of the increased communication & dialogue activities back into science – changes in the self-perception and value structures

- Impact of the growing demand for researchers to get involved

- Spaces for these kinds of reflections **within** knowledge generation systems

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(4) Temporal dimensions of Science in Society issues

✓ Temporalities/Timing of dialogue, participation, communication (When (up-stream engagement debate)?, How long? How often? …..)

✓ Challenge of **emerging** scientific and technological

✓ Relation of different temporal logics and their frictions: innovation/research/members of society; speed narrative

✓ Techno-scientific **futures** and **the economy of promise**:

- obsession with colonizing and controlling the future – how to do anticipation work?
- Where and how are these techno-scientific futures created, tamed, told, distributed, traded, …?
- Who participates in these activities?
- What is their impact on contemporary choices?

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