

Paper proposal for the Second Berlin Forum Innovation in Governance: 'Knowing governance: The making of governance knowledge and the transformation of politics', 19–20 May 2011

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Knowing participatory governance: the construction, mobilisation and professionalisation of public participation expertise

In participatory governance of science and the environment the obsession with developing new deliberative and dialogue based methods and mechanisms to evaluate their effectiveness has hitherto left little space for reflection on the very innovation and knowledge production processes that bring them about. This is somewhat surprising given that social scientists have themselves been heavily involved in devising these new forms of governance. Furthermore, public participation expertise has become an established category, and the 'mediator' or 'facilitator' a new type of expert, adopting increasingly powerful roles at the science-policy-society interface linked to a global circulation of social scientific knowledges, technologies of participation, people and skills.

This paper is part of an emerging body of research exploring how knowledge, expertise, technologies and innovation in participatory governance gets made, contested and has effects. Moving beyond situated studies of discrete participatory experiments or particular participatory methods the paper offers a broader analysis at the level of participatory governance networks that cut across emerging areas of science and technology in the UK. It draws on recent research that in turn builds on one of the first ever studies of public participation experts and the various technologies of democracy that they enact. Three main areas of insight are developed, namely: the nature and mobilisation of public participation expertise; the (often invisible) processes underlying the professionalisation and standardisation of participatory governance mechanisms and their contestation; and the dominant innovations pathways followed by technologies of participation (thus touching upon all three themes addressed in this Forum).

- First, public participation expertise is shown to be defined by personal experience and learning-by-doing as well as claims to neutrality and independence. The latter involves continual boundary work on the part of the mediator to maintain a distinction between their technical expertise/procedures and the competing demands of science, politics and society. This embodied expertise coupled with careful boundary work allows mediators to mobilise both themselves as experts and associated technologies (or tools) of participation across governance issues and domains at different spatial and temporal scales.
- Second, participatory expertise becomes an established category through intensifying processes of standardisation, professionalisation, and commercialisation, associated with (but not limited to): the drafting of guidelines, designing training courses, professional accreditation systems, the marketing of deliberative techniques and services, intellectual property rights, establishing 'institutions of participation', and structures for resource allocation. Such processes have an indirect but powerful role in prescribing particular forms of

public debate, and simultaneously raise concerns over the homogenisation, decontextualisation and depoliticisation of public dialogue.

- Third, in terms of innovation in participatory governance possible pathways have been closed down around heavily managed and formal spaces of 'invited micro' public dialogue. Highly centralised forms of resourcing and control, and aforementioned processes of professionalisation, serve to further 'lock in' commitments to these particular technologies of participation. While deliberation and innovation/market agendas have long been held in opposition, here they appear closely intertwined; which emphasises the coproduction of participatory mechanisms vis-à-vis the materiality and politics of the issues to which they are addressed.