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Commentary

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Partly in response to the acknowledged problems in the relationships between publics and science, there has been a rush in recent years to increase public participation in issues involving science and technology. Events have been hosted by a variety of organizations employing a variety of techniques – from citizens’ juries to consensus conferences, deliberative panels and multi-criteria mapping. Their foci have been different, with some responding to crisis and concerns over risks from technology; some aimed at including citizen input and expertise in particular plans and decisions; and some with a broader mandate to explore wider technology futures and development options.

This section draws together several examples of such initiatives. John Forrester and Steve Cinderby illustrate the use of Geographical Information Systems in the UK and South Africa to incorporate citizen expertise into models – of breast cancer and water quality – and to engage in discussion of the scenarios produced from such combinations of citizen and expert data. Jason Chilvers discusses the use of deliberative and inclusionary processes to engage citizens in debate about waste management options in their local areas and the creation of networks to link such local processes. Audley Genus and Tee Rogers-Hayden show how the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification in New Zealand attempted to offer a space for an open-ended discussion of strategic options, although the limits of this quickly became apparent. Elijah Rusike describes a citizens’ jury and scenario workshopping process in Zimbabwe which investigated rural futures, and particularly the role of biotechnologies within them.

Across these cases, a number of questions emerge concerning the terms of public participation, and the models of citizenship these imply. There has been a long history of reflection on these issues in the context of development interventions that have attempted to create spaces for invited participation. First, these reflections have identified invited participation as a social event in which particular types of power dynamics come to prevail, resulting in the exclusion of particular social groups, knowledges or tacit ontologies (e.g. Mosse 1994). Second, such events are often orchestrated, convened in the terms of their host institutions, whether these are local governments, aid agencies or activist NGOs. The effect is often to

introduce a certain instrumentalism, whereby citizens are enrolled in a set of institutionally pre-defined agendas where 'science' or 'risk issues' are presented in a particular way. Citizens are cast as those who 'use or choose' among a given array of options, rather than as those who might 'make or shape' agendas derived from their own framing of the issues (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). Third, a consequence of these dynamics is that participatory processes are vulnerable to framing in terms of the knowledges and life-worlds of the contextually powerful; as Chambers asks, 'Whose reality counts?' (Chambers 1997). Fourth, questions arise about the relationship between invited spaces and wider political processes: whether by their nature invited spaces are isolated and isolating, or whether they are the crucible for broader processes of social and political transformation (Cornwall 2002). This in turn raises broader questions about the institutional and political context within which participation takes place and the ends it is expected to serve: whether it involves manipulation or co-option to support the status quo and divert opposing voices or engenders social transformation will depend on the nature of the state, its relationship with civil society, and the issue in question. Finally, a set of questions arises concerning the relationship between participation and other citizenship rights. It has been argued that the right to participation is a prior right, in that only through participation can people claim other – material, social or political – rights and so become full citizens. It is also argued that the process of participating provides a context for the performance of citizenship, and for social and experiential learning about what it means to be a citizen. The extent to which such action-based learning carries beyond the invited setting into wider political arenas, and engenders broader processes of empowerment and rights-claiming, will, however, depend on the context. As several chapters in this book have noted, there are particular difficulties in 'scaling up' invited participation into global arenas.

As Chapter 2 outlined, different theories of citizenship are linked with particular models of participation. But the converse is also true: that different modes of participation implicitly create different models of citizenship. What has emerged from the long experience with invited participation in development, and which is echoed to some extent in the cases in this section, is that very often the forms of citizenship implied are highly circumscribed.

Much of the debate about public engagement in issues concerning science and technology has been cast in terms of the oppositions between participation and non-participation, scientific expertise and lay knowledge, quantitative and qualitative, and reductionist and holistic. As Andy Stirling argues, however, a more salient distinction is between whether processes are 'open' or 'closed', drawing attention to considerations of power, trans-

parency and accountability in policy justification and appraisal. This applies to any process. Indeed, as he argues, and echoing the development studies critiques above, processes that are labelled 'participatory' may be just as closed as those that are not.

The focus on invited, or orchestrated, participation within both development studies and science studies has perhaps diverted attention from the myriad other ways in which people practise citizenship in relation to issues involving science and technology. These range from pressing perspectives and claims through the law, the media and the Internet to organized activism and protest. These draw on multiple identifications, whether of consumer, green environmentalist, feminist, anti-war, anti-globalization, victim or a host of others. They too may, depending on their form and context, offer opportunities for opening up debate; or in their own particular ways, they may have closing down effects. While these avenues often require organized forms of solidarity and performative citizenship, there may be other more private, hidden or tacit forms of citizenship which find their expression through irony, satire, jokes, hidden transcripts and 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985, 1990).

A key question concerns the extent to which these avenues, as complements or alternatives to invited participation, offer a vista of cultural possibilities for new forms of politics and democratic imaginations. One needs to ask whether, and under what conditions, and in what combinations, they offer routes to more vital forms of dissent, to cognitive justice, to genuine negotiation of knowledges, and to political negotiation between ways of life grounded in mutual recognition and respect. This challenge has never been more pressing given that human subjectivities are at the same time being forged through a new politics of the global, and through an increasing pertinence of the politicization of the private self and the body raised by the challenges of new technologies. What is certain is that among this plurality and hybridity, dialogue, reflexivity and a practised form of performative citizenship must take centre stage, recapturing diverse imaginations of the future in the face of pervasive scientizing, globalizing and neo-liberalizing discourses. As Sheila Jasanoff put it:¹ 'I am calling for us to embrace a more complete imagination of the citizen; somebody with a lifecycle, with a history ... someone who knows things and has a capacity to make decisions. If we could elevate that discourse of citizenship then we could revive the political from the decline into which it has fallen in recent years.'

Note

1 In a concluding commentary to the IDS conference 'Science and Citizenship in a Global Context: Challenges from New Technologies' in December 2002.