NANO2ALL

SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT ON RESPONSIBLE NANOTECHNOLOGY

preliminary results - Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue in Poland

NANO2ALL – MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

Organised by Bialystok University of Technology (BUT)

Bialowieza, Poland – October 20-21, 2017

The Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Bialystok University of Technology (BUT), a Third Party in the Nano2all project, was the organizer of the Polish multi-stakeholder dialogue on nanotechnology in textiles. BUT is the largest technical higher education institution in the north-eastern part of Poland. It has built a large network of relations with business, NGOs, administration and media. One of the distinctive competences of BUT is its expertise in foresight methodology which has also been applied to explore potential scenarios of nanotechnology development in the region. Additionally, BUT takes seriously its mission to advance the public's understanding of science. It this context, it has decided to become a member of ECSITE – the European Network of Science Centres and Museums.

The multi-stakeholder dialogue took place on 20-21 October 2017 in Bialowieza, Poland. It was attended by 20 participants purposefully selected to achieve representation of business, academia, public administration, civil society and media. The event was also attended by Jantien Schuijer from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, a co-author of the workshop methodology.

The workshop turned out to be a good space for the exchange of views between various stakeholders but also an opportunity to work on recommendations regarding the long term development of nanotechnology; a development based on the cooperation of different types of actors. The core element of the workshop – the scenario exploration exercise – was a tool to formulate alternative visions of the future in respect to nanotechnology development. It set the mindset of participants towards the future and created space for a creative confrontation of ideas, assumptions and goals.

Some findings and conclusions

Below are some findings and reflections from the Polish multi-stakeholder dialogue:

1. Participants appreciated the strategic value of the scenario exploration game. In their opinion, it had an educational/cognitive value as well as practical significance. The players were stimulated to think strategically, to take into account many different perspectives and to look for areas of possible cooperation with other players. The cognitive aspect of the game consisted in the identification of needs and expectations of other players as well as in realizing real obstacles in building relations. Thanks to the game, the problematic of nanotechnology was transformed from an abstract concept into an issue that is closely related to the actual social and economic conditions of the region and the country. The participants came up with the idea to double the number of players at the table. That would enable discussion between players with the same role, which could deepen the reflection and contribute to creating an even more inspiring scenario.

2. It was admitted that sometimes the interaction between stakeholders may need to be enforced to a certain extent, at least at the beginning (before different actors realise its benefits). More sensitivity and openness to others' needs should be encouraged. Nanotechnology turned out to be a good starting point for a more general reflection about the technological, social and economic development in different countries and regions.

3. True cooperation of different stakeholders in the realm of responsible nanotechnology development is a hard challenge. Conflicts of interests are inevitable. Various stakeholders have different goals when it comes to nanotechnology development. It is critical to create space to make these goals known, to enhance understanding and to eliminate prejudice and ignorance. Online platforms as well as face-to-face events were indicated as possible solutions.
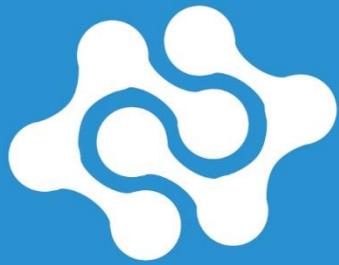
Furthermore, dialogue participants made some concrete recommendations regarding the actions and interactions necessary for socially responsible research and innovation in the field of nanotechnology:

- It is necessary to disseminate knowledge about responsible innovations in the area of nanotechnology. In the opinion of workshop participants, responsible innovations allow to accept not only one's point of view, but also to satisfy the needs of diverse groups of citizens. Because of this, it is necessary to have wider access to knowledge about socially responsible nanotechnology innovations dedicated to citizens. The consequence of this would be the greater involvement of citizens (potential consumers) in the

process of creating socially responsible innovations. Currently, society evaluates the product that has already been developed, but the more important aspect seems to be the process of product creation.

- Current social problems are an opportunity to strengthen cooperation within responsible innovation. Aging societies are a common challenge and a great opportunity to create joint activities - this problem affects everyone without exception.

- It was noticed that the messages disseminated in the media today, but also the activities of the business, are more oriented towards individualism and not towards society as a whole. This limits the dissemination of knowledge about socially responsible innovations as innovation that ensures the development of many groups of citizens. Changing the rhetoric and the core of communication will result in greater openness to the needs of others and will in the future ensure the recognition of many benefits resulting from cooperation.

- The development of socially responsible innovations based on nanotechnology requires the cooperation of many stakeholders. It was emphasized that the most important are ties generated locally. The relations between the local community and business, but also between the local business and representatives of NGOs should be developed. These types of relationships are more personal and lasting. Researchers and universities should also be active in the field of local and regional cooperation.

- The representatives of governance should be involved in the process of creating socially responsible nanotechnology innovations, but this interference should be indirect and not direct. The task of government programs should be to create the conditions for the cooperation of various groups of stakeholders and not to give guidelines about how this cooperation should look like.

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