

Inclusion in Co-creation: What is Needed in Practice?



Key requirements for realising inclusion in co-creation:

- Investing in co-creation and develop skills and competencies of organisers to develop strategies that ensure continuous inclusion
- Carefully balancing the topic, questions and preparatory materials to avoid common difficulties for inclusion in co-creation and engagement processes
- Paying attention to your communication strategy and the messages you share about your project and process to communicate in a way that supports inclusion and diversity

The issue at stake

Attempts to make technology development more inclusive have been at the heart of discussions in technology governance for decades. Being inclusive is both a challenge and a benefit for technology development. Designing co-creation and engagement processes for nanotechnology development requires conscious strategies, skills and resources. GoNano emphasised the importance of action and inclusion from the outset, and assumed that innovation processes are open to be adapted accordingly to societal inputs. GoNano also attempted to provide a method to grapple with societal concerns as comprehensively as possible by considering diversity in interests, concerns and values. The main challenges in co-creation were seen to be the additional effort for organisers to: (1) keep the diverse participants interested and active during the whole process; (2) clearly communicate aims and possible outcomes and impact to all actors involved; and (3) establish appreciative and respectful communication between all actors.



Generally speaking, we relate differently to new technologies like nanotechnology, depending on the different roles we take up in society in various ways.

GoNano Workshop Participant 2019

GoNano strategy and key findings

Keeping stakeholders and citizens on board requires that the co-creation process is, and remains, relevant and interesting to all participants, as the whole outcome of the project depends on their motivation and engagement. Therefore, it is essential to explore the interests of stakeholders and society (citizens and other societal stakeholders) before co-creation starts, and to continuously reflect these throughout the process. The co-creation workshop setting and agenda must be attractive to all participants, so that they engage in bilateral exchanges rather than simply receiving information about an interesting topic (e.g. nanotechnology keynotes), which as an exclusive motivation could lead to an increase in the number of passive participants and drop-outs.

Co-creation itself requires translational efforts to facilitate a fruitful communication between a diverse general public on the one hand, taking into account their values, needs and expectations, and engineers and researchers on the other, who have quite clear ideas of innovation, development and progress. Co-creation should produce visible or tangible outcomes for all participants involved.



In doing so, it can help develop technologies that include non-mainstream opinions and ideas as an expression of effective inclusion and communication.

By investing in additional efforts, skills and strategies for communication and coordination,

GoNano successfully navigated multiple co-creation processes. Workshops benefitted from facilitators who ensured continuous inclusion of participants in the individual groups, e.g. by countering dominant members of groups during discussions. The facilitators also countered the difficult challenge of keeping the focus in the workshops on nanotechnology instead of extending the debates to a much wider context of developing new technologies in relation to societal needs.

Key recommendations

on realising inclusiveness in co-creation processes

- Inclusion needs additional efforts, skills, and resources

Making co-creation relevant and workable for all participants is crucial for its success. Organisers and decision makers must acknowledge the extra effort required to achieve this and policies should support the provision of appropriate resources for its realization.

- Clarity on purpose, contribution, and role

Despite repeatedly stating the topic and the goals of the day before and during the co-creation events, in some cases these remained abstract for many participants. Even more effort to provide balanced information (e.g. scenarios of possible future everyday-life applications) is recommended to enable equal participation.

- Frame the role of citizens and highlight potential beneficial inclusion effects

Stakeholders in all workshops saw the relevance of including societal needs and values in the early phases of research and innovation. Some stakeholders even saw a consultation as too passive a format and that, with a clear framing, they could have even more appreciation for the role and contribution of the citizens, not only as users but as agents of societal values.

- Ensure a continuous communication process

To achieve specific product and/or research suggestions and to foster the participants' sense of ownership, a series of workshops are essential, rather than one-off events. A long-term interactive process with a continuous dialogue is therefore required to keep enthusiastic stakeholders involved in the project and to motivate other stakeholders to take up the action as well.

Also see GoNano Policy number 7 for additional considerations on how to be inclusive and consider the full diversity of societal and behavioural roles.

The EU-funded GoNano project (Governing Nanotechnologies through Societal Engagement) aims to align future nanotechnologies with societal needs and concerns. From September 2017 until December 2020, GoNano brought together citizens, researchers, industry, civil society organisations and policy makers across Europe to co-create concrete suggestions for future nanotechnologies.

The GoNano policy briefs present the results of the engagement activities and provide recommendations based on the GoNano experiences. This is the sixth of a series of seven policy briefs. Please see <http://gonano-project.eu/policy-briefs/> for the complete series.



GoNano is a Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Union under the NMBP Programme of Horizon 2020, Grant Agreement n° 7 68622.



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