

Governance of and by expectations

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In recent years, various studies have examined how expectations create shared and contested socio-technical futures, coordinate innovation actors and contribute to shaping technologies and socio-technical systems. In particular, expectations have been shown to play a decisive role in transition processes, be it in the form of guiding visions as an essential part of transition management or more specific expectations at the level of niches and local projects.

At the same time, expectations are themselves continuously coordinated and shaped in public discourses, in professional communities and in organizations. Furthermore, policy and corporate actors are increasingly initiating dedicated attempts at systematic envisioning and assessment. In parallel, professionalization and commercialization of expectation-building has taken place with experts and organizations such as consultancies and other forecasting agencies playing a decisive role in organizing expectations in specific fields. Hence, expectations play a decisive role in 'governing', that is, coordinating and shaping innovation and transition processes and they are themselves 'governed' in distinct ways.

The paper proposes the concept of governance of and by expectations, in order to capture a) the different modes of producing and coordinating expectations, ranging from the seemingly 'unbound' expectations in societal discourses to expectations 'tamed' in dedicated foresight, forecasting and technology assessment processes, and b) the different modes of how expectations coordinate and shape socio-technical developments. The concept is based on a broad understanding of governance including intentional governance, that is, intentional attempts at shaping and coordinating expectations, as well as de-facto governance referring to the patterns and structures of coordination that emerge largely non-intentionally from the interaction of many actors.

This conceptualization builds the ground for investigating the relationship between governance of and governance by expectations and for examining the specific modes and arrangements of governance of and by expectations in different societal settings as technology fields, societal spheres and organizations. To what extent differ the roles of specific governance modes of expectations in coordinating and shaping socio-technical developments and how are different governance modes related? For instance, what is the specific role of collective expectations in public discourses compared to expectations shaped in foresight or TA processes and how do both 'governance modes' influence each other? Furthermore, how does the governance of and by expectations evolve and change over time? Partly these changes will be a result of the reflexive relations between the expectations and the actors and institutional arrangements within an innovation field, since the expectations which emerge within a given societal domain may feed back on the structure that shaped them.

The paper will elaborate the conceptual framework, and integrate findings from the different literature strands and studies which have tackled specific aspects of the topic (e.g. sociology of expectations, governance studies, foresight and technology assessment literature). It will specify idealtypical governance modes of expectations, and examine their interdependencies and their specific role in the governance by expectations. Furthermore, we will illustrate hypotheses with findings from fuel cell innovation and nanotechnology.