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A European Transparency Arena for political insight and accountability  
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The document consists of the power point presentation made at the seminar, with texts belonging to each picture.



## **A European Transparency Arena for political insight and accountability**

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**European Parliament  
Seminar, March 5, 2008**

Thank you Anders,

First I want to thank Olle Schmidt and Anders Wijkman for hosting this event, and also STOA, GLOBE EU and SPN for the cooperation in organizing it. I also want to thank the previous speakers, Steffi Friedrichs and Pat Mooney for their interesting and thoughtful presentations. Then of course it was a privilege for us all to listen to the Swedish minister for EU affairs, Cecilia Malmström. It was especially inspiring to hear about her emphasis on the importance of openness and transparency.



How were we to communicate the safety  
assessment and make it accessible to politicians  
and the public?

This seminar, as well as the ideas I am going to present here, is the result of a process which has taken place over several years. The origin is a discussion we had at the Swedish Nuclear Power Inspectorate fifteen years ago.

People at the Inspectorate dealing with nuclear waste were recruited as good scientists and experts as the entire nuclear waste management programme was at the stage of research and development. Some of us, however, understood that we would get new customers for our safety assessments for nuclear waste repositories, namely politicians and citizens in municipalities. How were we to communicate the safety assessment and make it accessible to politicians and the public?

The very complex area of nuclear waste management needed a re-framing from being totally expert dominated to include much more of dialogue and transparency. It is now apparent that this is common for almost all policy areas with some complexity, like nanotechnology.

We have been developing methods for transparency, first at the Nuclear Power Inspectorate, then with Oskarshamn municipality and now for the Swedish Council for Nuclear Waste. Many have contributed to the approach. First professors Clas-Otto Wene in Sweden and Raul Espejo in UK laid the theoretical foundations. Professor Patricia Ann Fleming in the US has given us the philosophical perspective and Britt-Marie Drottz Sjöberg, now professor in Trondheim, Norway, has contributed with a social-psychology perspective. Together we are a quite cross-disciplinary group based in physics, energy systems, organization theory, philosophy and social psychology.



## **areas investigated**

**mobile telephone systems**  
**remediation of chemically contaminated sites**  
**different types of energy projects**  
**nuclear waste disposal**

During latest years we have used our approach in different areas, such as mobile telephone systems, remediation of chemically contaminated sites and other types of energy projects.

Over the years I have become increasingly interested in the interface between science and politics, and how transparency can support decision-making in a political context. And now we are all here to discuss if this can be organized in a European Union context.



How can this young lady benefit during her life from nanotechnologies? There are many possibilities.

For example, nanotechnology is expected to have a huge impact on the medical industry including diagnostic techniques as well as drug development and delivery. It may increase the possibility of early disease detection, real-time assessment, tailored therapy for each patient and also preventive measures. Maybe she has already been subject to some kind of genetic testing and as a result her parents may now know about diseases she is predisposed to get, which increases the possibilities for preventive measures.

Such opportunities are an example of nanotechnology being applied in specific fields, such as medicine- an example of why we talk about nanotechnologies in plural. In the long term, there are other possible applications which may lead to revolutionary improvements in many other areas such as faster computers, more efficient cars and a cleaner environment.

Finally, of course, for the EU nanotechnologies are seen as an important contribution to economic development and European competitiveness with the US, Japan, China and so on.



However, as we have heard today there are also hazards and possible risks.

In medical applications, there may be risky side-effects for patients. For example, it may be the case that nanodevices designed for drug delivery have negative effects because of their possible capacity to pass through biological systems (for instance, crossing the blood-brain barrier and penetrating into the brain). Concerns have been raised that there could be a new asbestos crisis around the corner. Concerns have also been raised that nanoparticles released to the environment may cause problems.

There are also ethical dilemmas. Nanomedicine can reinforce personal freedom by improved precision in diagnosis combined with an increasing number of treatment options. But this may also create anxiety by increasing individual responsibility for the choices made.

And should third parties such as insurance companies and employers have access to information obtained by refined nanomedical diagnostic methods, made possible combining nanotech with biotechnology and information technology. If so, under what conditions?



These issues and others related to complex technologies are quite impossible for an individual to grasp by simply reading reports and web site documents. We all have infinite access to information as soon as we sit down with a computer with internet connection. And we are overwhelmed with lots of information sources.



## The market of arguments

### Stakeholders:

How to market factual information?

**A matter of resources rather than having "the best argument"**

### Political decision makers:

How to evaluate arguments of stakeholders and lobbyists? Personal trust?

**Lack of overview**

### Government agencies and experts:

How to gain interest and trust in own evaluations?

**Public participation and consultation - at the expense of expert integrity?**

### Public:

Information overflow but limited attention span - who shall I trust?

**No real challenging of arguments – lower level of awareness**

## Frustration on all sides

We have a market of arguments where different stakeholders, industries, experts, government agencies, and lobbyists are trying to get their messages through.

Stakeholders wanting to provide "neutral information" get more and more frustrated. It becomes a matter of resources rather than having "the best argument" (access to media, financial resources, etc).

Politicians find it increasingly hard to evaluate the arguments, they have no possibility to get a comprehensive view they can rely on. It means that other factors than factual issues increase in importance, such as trust in certain actors in the market of arguments.

Government agencies and experts may find it difficult to find their proper place in the market. They have the problem of how to gain interest and trust in their evaluations. During the last decade they gave interest to public participation and consultation – the question is if this has given what was expected. It should also be emphasized that Government agencies also have their own stakes – they are stakeholders themselves.

The individual citizen has no chance to follow the market, other than on a very superficial level. Most activities go on above his head, he doesn't know who to trust and he cannot see any real challenging of arguments.

So, all in all, we have a situation with frustration and feelings of uneasiness on all sides.



This situation is not unique for nanotechnologies of course. It is the same for all policy issues with a complex scientific and technologic content, that also includes values and emotions. Here are only four examples.

The assessment of safety of nuclear power reactors and nuclear waste disposal are almost icons of the problem.

There is a technique, carbon capture and storage (CCS), that many claim has very high potential for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> releases. However, the risk communication with stakeholders, such as local populations, has hardly yet begun.

The installation on the third generation of mobiles telephone systems has caused concerns about possible risks.

And then, of course, we have biotechnology in its many forms. We all know about the European controversies around GM crops. One element in the discussion about nanotech is how to avoid all these problems to occur once again.



### **Technology driven areas, such as these, tend to create:**

- enthusiasm and narrow framing, in early days
- concerns, negative events, media debates, conflicting interests, frustration, and the framing found irrelevant, at later stages
- fragmentation by interest groups
- backlash, and the decision making system gets paralysed

In technology driven areas the following scenario is not uncommon.

First there is great optimism about a new technology in industry and science which disseminates to media, politicians and the general public.

Due to interests, values and certain ways of thinking, groups frame an issue by defining what the issue is about. Once a person or a group has established a frame, it affects their notions of what evidence is relevant and what considerations should be declared out of bounds. In the early stages of technology development, it is the experts that do the framing.

This tends to ignore broader issues of concern for people, and also potential risks are too little dealt with. However these issues sooner or later, come up in public debate and then often as fragmented pieces of information that get much attention in media. If the debate then gets polarized and hostile it can paralyse the decision-making system and there is a backlash.

This has happened many times, GM crops is an obvious example, so are the many efforts to site repositories for high level nuclear waste, which have all failed so far, with the exception of Finland and Sweden, and possibly the US.



## **1<sup>st</sup> approach – information**

**Of course politicians and citizens at large need to be informed**

**BUT**

**people are already over flooded with all sources of information and cannot take more on board.**

**more information may in fact reinforce negative opinions**

**More or less hopeless!**

When there is dispute about a new technology it is often said that more information will increase the level of acceptance. There are two problems with this idea.

First, it is almost impossible to get attention for information about serious matters since people are already over flooded with all sorts of information including more PR related information playing with peoples emotions, thus directly designed to break through our “attention barrier”.

Secondly, If you actually succeed to come through with information it can well be the case that more disagreement will be the result since people may conclude that the information only confirms their early views.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> approach – participation

Social and behavioural sciences were brought in and:

**Participation became the solution, with consensus and acceptance as anticipated results.**

Some concerns though:

- Public has limited time and attention span
- Methods are often expert driven
- NGO:s tend to dominate the scene - or they stay away
- Inadequate challenging of stakeholder arguments
- Result is often lacking democratic accountability

Both practical and democratic problems

Experiences from many fields thus tell us that something new is needed for societal decisions to become well informed and grounded in societal values.

Having realized the limitations of information, the idea came up to involve concerned stakeholders and citizens more in the decision making. For example, the nuclear waste management organizations around the globe, having met fundamental problems in the siting of repositories, turned to social sciences to get advice on how to perform in order to get acceptance. There have also been many initiatives internationally and in individual countries to involve stakeholders such as potential host communities in the programmes. This development has been very good and it has opened new perspectives and new arenas for discussion.

However, the initially promising ideas of participative and deliberative democracy have their limitations and drawbacks. There was perhaps an ungrounded expectation that social sciences would come up with a toolbox for how to reach consensus or at least general acceptance – a social technical fix.

Again, the lack of time and attention span normal people have for taking part in deliberation about, say, nuclear waste problems set limits for what can be done. Furthermore, participatory methods are often expert driven. NGO:s tend to dominate the scene – if they don't stay away. There is often inadequate challenging of stakeholder arguments.

Another problem is accountability. IF a set of stakeholders together in a participative process come up with a recommended solution and if the political decision makers follow that recommendation – who is accountable if something goes wrong? And what becomes the role of elected representatives? Wouldn't participative democracy even more reduce their role? And what is then left for our elected politicians to decide?

So in the end one can ask if the participative processes really create the awareness needed for democratic decisions. There are both practical and democratic problems.



## Governance

... by information is a hopeless enterprise

... by participation doesn't work either

In summary we can, a little provocative, say that governance by information is a hopeless enterprise and that participation doesn't work either. But the politicians cannot escape from their responsibility to lead and take decisions.

Today we have listened to Steffi Friedrichs and Pat Mooney. They both gave us interesting information from different angles and with different contents. However, it is unlikely that we as citizens and politicians would feel well prepared for making decisions on e.g. if existing regulations are sufficient or not based on their and others information. We could get citizen input e.g. by arranging for focus group discussion or consensus conferences. The question is if that would help much for well informed decisions.

There has also been some debate between the two and we would like to go deeper into the issues and challenge the arguments made by Steffi and Pat. Something more active than information and consensus building needs to be done.



In nanotechnologies - as well as in all other cases I have mentioned - experts and lobbyists fight for politicians' attention. Here a lobbyist has convinced a politician. Maybe there is a risk that those who succeed are able to take politicians as "hostages" for specific interests. However, lobbyists for other stakeholders may do the same with other politicians so in a way there is a functioning market.



**We want high quality decisions, made  
with integrity, and this requires:**

- Best possible decision-making basis
- Insight from decision-makers and citizens

However, we want high quality decisions made with integrity, which requires both the best possible decision-making basis and insight from decision-makers and the citizens.



**Transparency Arenas for political insight  
and accountability**

Arenas where all arguments are put forward and  
challenged in a structured way

Our response to this requirement is the creation of Transparency Arenas for political insight and accountability. This is arenas where all arguments are put forward and challenged in a structured way. I will soon tell you how it can be done.



## Key concepts:

Stretching, i.e. challenging of arguments

Fairness

Impartiality

Accountability

Transparency

First however, let us look at the foundation on which the transparency process is based, and its key concepts.

We have invented the concept of stretching for the challenging of arguments. It means you must meet questions from new angles and challenges from the surrounding society.

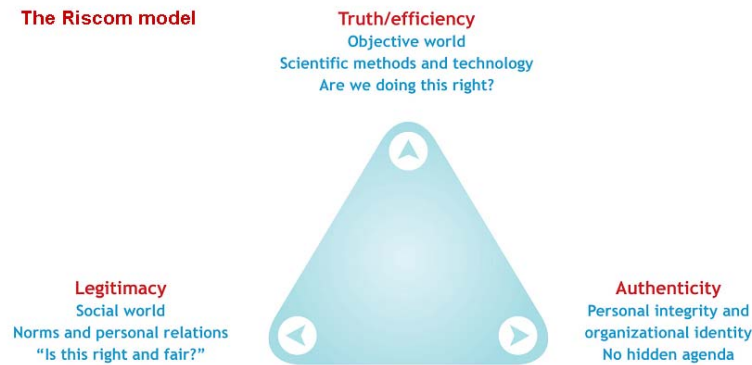
Fairness means that participants must have a real possibility to influence agendas. Agreeing upon and making public the “rules of the game” among the parties involved as early in the process as possible, is an important element of transparency. Different viewpoints must be given opportunities to participate.

Furthermore, the Transparency Process must be perceived as impartial and with no vested interest.

Accountability is for both politicians and stakeholders: for politicians it means they are accountable for their decisions, for stakeholders it means they are accountable for their arguments

*Transparency* is a nice word, but in order to be useful, the concept requests structure and a deeper meaning. We have a model for this, called the RISCUM model.

## Transparency



The key idea with the RISCUM Model is to make arguments transparent. Any argument consists of three claims: This is right, this is legitimate and I am authentic meaning I don't have an hidden agenda. One can also say we are dealing with the objective world, the social world and the individual himself. All three aspects are equally important. To do things right is important of course but first you need to do the right things, and what you do must be consistent with what you are saying. We should thus look for transparency processes that makes it possible for all interested and everyone involved to evaluate the three claims.



### **We don't aim for consensus:**

The transparency process should not result in recommendations to decision-makers, e.g. if a certain technology should, or should not, be accepted.

We don't aim for consensus per se. Our approach can lead to increasing consensus, but not necessarily so. Equally, we are not looking for "acceptance" since that would mean we know from the beginning what should be the result. On the other hand, the challenging of arguments is not aimed for a more polarized debate but for increased clarity and understanding.



### **We do, however, aim for structure and clarity:**

The one aim is to create an arena where all stakeholders increase their awareness. The political system then takes over.

We do, however, aim for a structured debate and the clarification of the factual and value-laden issues. The only one aim is to create an arena where all stakeholders increase their awareness. The political system then takes over in decision-making .



## This is how it's done

**Project team:** competence in process, competence in subject, declaration of interest

**Reference group:** stakeholder participation (e.g. industry, academia, authorities, NGO:s), formal agreement, advises on context and aim and conduct of the project

**Knowledge building activities:** seminars etc

**Hearings with stretching,** i.e. stakeholder arguments are challenged in a structured way: a tailored format for transparency.

*A transparency project is done with the following process*

First we organize a Project Team, which does most of the work, Members must have competence in process, and competence in the subject being addressed. All members of the Project Team must make a declaration of interest.

Then we set up a Reference Group which shall have stakeholder participation (e.g. industry, academia, authorities, NGO:s) This group advises on aim and conduct of the project.

The Parties represented in the Reference Group set up an Agreement between themselves that covers the objective of the Project, its organization, activities to be performed, economic reimbursement and reporting.

The participants may need to build a common base of knowledge before the stretching takes place. Therefore seminars can be arranged for subjects the reference group agrees on.

The main events are hearings with stretching, meaning that stakeholder arguments are challenged in a structured way from different angles. This is a tailored hearing format to gain transparency. The actual hearings may be combined with group work activities. It is not our aim to create unnecessary polarization but to increase clarity about factual and value-laden issues.



## The new transparency approach

- a new **professional identity** for awareness creation with its own ideals, education and culture
- formal **institutional settings** to enhance transparency as support for decision-makers and for public insight
- which can be done at **all levels** of policy making (local, national, EU, regional, international)

I have now described the process we would follow for a project addressing a certain issue like nanotechnology. The vision is that the new transparency approach should permeate social decision-making in a broad sense. We should always have it in mind when new technologies or new risks emerge on the scene. To make it operational, we would need a new professional identity for awareness creation with its own ideals, education and culture.

There should be formal institutional settings to enhance transparency as support for decision-makers and for public insight. This could be done, and it would be relevant, at all levels of policy making (local, national, EU, regional, international).

A development in this direction will lead to

- some order and structure on the market of arguments
- awareness of consequences of decisions
- more political accountability

If you are interested to go deeper into this you may read my upcoming book "*Transparency and Accountability in Science and Politics*". There you find the philosophy, the political science aspect and case studies that are behind this idea for a new approach to transparency and accountability. Information on the book can be found by the following link:

<http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?PID=281166>



## Proposal

- launch a transparency project about nanotechnology
- carbon capture and storage (CCS) and animal cloning have also been suggested
- organize a working group with MEPs and representatives of the Commission to propose how the transparency approach can be put to use in EU – the European Transparency Arena

I have argued that we should vitalize our processes for decision-making. The awareness of new technologies must be increased among both the politicians and the citizens who elect them. To some extent, the renewal must create new institutional structures. Equally importantly, it will mean a new way of thinking and a new approach to the complex problems we have to solve.

So my talk ends up in a proposal for your consideration:

We launch a transparency project about nanotechnology. Considering the interest for this event that area seems to be a good candidate for a first application. It should also be said that during my preparatory work for this seminar carbon capture and storage (CCS) and animal cloning have also been suggested as application areas.

Such a project, or projects, should not be an isolated effort, however, if we want the transparency approach to root and flourish in Europe. In particular, I suggest that a working group to be organized with Members of Parliament and representatives of the Commission having the task to propose how the transparency approach can be institutionalised in EU – the European Transparency Arena. Eventually this could be linked to the ongoing work with a parliamentary reform in this house.

Thank you for your attention!  
Kjell Andersson