

Engaging public researchers in regulation and the general public in science

Aarhus Convention-Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety round
table on access to information, public participation and
access to justice regarding GMOs

Geneva, 16-17 October 2013

Marcel Kuntz

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS)

Laboratoire de Physiologie Cellulaire Végétale

Grenoble, France

www.marcel-kuntz-ogm.fr



The Public Research and Regulation Initiative

PRRI is a world-wide initiative of public sector scientists active in modern biotechnology for the common good.

PRRI's overall objective is to offer public researchers a forum to be informed about and involved in international regulations relevant to modern biotechnology.

One of PRRI's aims is to bring more science to the international debate on biotechnology.

PRRI promotes freedom of choice.



Bringing more science to the debate on biotechnology.

On request of FAO, PRRI has conducted a survey of initiatives used by scientists and farmer organizations to communicate about biotechnology and biosafety.

On the basis of interviews with organizers of the initiatives as well as members of the target audiences, lessons learnt are collated into a guidance document.

Report will be available later in 2013.

Bringing more science to the debate on biotechnology.

Communication Tools used by PRRI

- PRRI Website (www.ppri.net)
- Social Media, e.g. Twitter
- Briefing Papers and **Open letters**
- Participation in negotiations and other meetings
- Debunking common misperceptions and conclusions of reports not supported by the underlying research
- Linking with national communication initiatives of PRRI members

Public engagement? Yes, but what does it mean?

1987: report by the **US National Academy of Science**

(Introduction of Recombinant DNA-Engineered Organisms into the Environment):

“there is no evidence that unique hazards exist in the use of recombinant DNA techniques or in the transfer of genes between unrelated organisms” and “ that the risks [...] are the same in kind as those associated with [...] other genetic techniques”.

Which “public” was willing to “participate” in a debate on this US-NAS statement in **1987**?

2013: huge amount of scientific data confirm the 1987 NAS statement

What would be the legitimacy for the “public” to “participate” in an adversarial “debate” to re-interpret the scientific data?

Science is not a matter of democracy!

science is the application of a method

“Because the truth is that promoting science isn’t just about providing resources—it’s about protecting free and open inquiry. It’s about ensuring that facts and evidence are never twisted or obscured by politics or ideology. **It’s about listening to what our scientists have to say, even when it’s inconvenient—especially when it’s inconvenient.** Because the highest purpose of science is the search for knowledge, truth and a greater understanding of the world around us.”

President Barack Obama, December 17, 2008

What is a matter of democracy is to share scientific knowledge

(exclude adulterated products of all kinds...)

Scientists do not (should not) claim any kind of power.

A scientist's role should be to communicate as honestly as possible about what we know and what we do not know.

Whether the public will then accept the technology or not should not prevent scientists from explaining the technology.

Applying the precautionary principle...

against ideologic interference with scientific risk assessment

European Food Safety Authority's Executive Director, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle: *"If we managed fifteen years ago to shun industrials off the evaluation committees, it was not for NGOs involved in the fight against genetically modified crops [...] to take their place! That would be a regression, dangerously turning back the clocks"* (translated from French).

There is ample space for “public engagement” in identifying politically-motivated distortions of facts by some governments... (and others...)

- **2009:** available meta-knowledge [...] was ignored by the German government which instead used selected individual studies...

Ricroch, Bergé, Kuntz. Is the German suspension of MON810 maize cultivation scientifically justified?, *Transgenic Res.* (2010) 19:1–12

- **2012:** To ‘justify’ the French MON810 ban, studies were cherry-picked and authentic scientific reports, including those of the EFSA, were distorted, misquoted and falsely interpreted. Other scientific articles relevant to the subject and providing a different picture were ignored.

- **2013:** The Italian ban document was a word-by-word translation of the French document already rejected by EFSA

Kuntz, Davison and Ricroch. What the French ban of Bt MON810 maize means for science-based risk assessment. *Nature biotechnology*, June 2013.

The postmodernist contemporary illusion: the shift from ‘public understanding’ of science to ‘public engagement’ in science

A typical delusion of the postmodern sociologists (‘science studies’ community) is the belief that “*knowledge co-production beyond the classic expert communities...can substantially benefit scientific design*”

It is now clear from the experience with the GMO dispute that neither the ‘participative’ postmodernist approach, nor the ‘parallel science’ created by GMO opponents, has led to any benefit for science, for risk assessment or for the general understanding of these processes.

Kuntz. Why the postmodern attitude towards science should be denounced. *EMBO Reports* 2013

If these ‘participative’ policies and the involvement of stakeholders can be considered as relevant and legitimate where decision-making is concerned, they ought not to interfere with what are ultimately scientific questions.

Kuntz. The postmodern assault on science. If all truths are equal, who cares what science has to say? *EMBO Reports* 2012

Relativist participatory debates have aggravated the dispute over GMOs, nanotechs, energy sources, etc.

The postmodernist approach has failed: « Explosion » of the French High Council on Biotechnologies

Implemented by law on June 25, 2008

“ HCB is an original structure in the European landscape ”

Two committees:

- **Scientific Committee** → *“ assess the impacts of biotechnologies on environment and health ”*
- **Economic, Ethic and Social Committee (CEES)** → 26 members: a forum of “stakeholders” (various lobbies, **opponents hold the majority**)

→ Clashes, no consensus, no sound recommendations on economical, ethical or social aspects : **ideology prevails!**

Several members resigned on Jan 17, 2012

*“ Significantly this anti-GMO attitude relies on **a total denial of any role for science** in plant breeding improvement and more globally in the living environment. The CEES failed to provide the general public and the layman with objective information around GM plants ”* (Jeanne Grosclaude, representing research personnel in CEES)

The postmodernist approach has failed:

Life and death of an “*Interactive Technology Assessment*” of a GM Grapevine field trial



March 2003: implementation of a **Local Monitoring Committee**
“with a large representation of stakeholders”

2004 : trial implemented at INRA-Colmar (France)

November 8, 2007: Pierre-Benoit Joly & Arie Rip

(*Nature* 450, 174) “*The experiment was highly productive*”

2010: “*The controversy that provided the foundations for discussion was transcribed into pertinent research questions that could then be addressed by scientists. The group was able to extricate itself from a weak consensus and open the way to “structured dissension”*”

(The Local Monitoring Committee et coll., PLoS Biol 8(11): e1000551)

September 2009: **trial vandalized by a single activist, re-implemented**

August 2010: **grapevine plants fully destroyed by 65 activists**

MECANISM OF DEEP GREEN & POSTMODERN ALLIANCE

INTIMIDATION / VIOLENCE

80 vandalisms against academic GM research in EU (compiled in Kuntz 2012)



“STUDIES” BY HETERODOX SCIENTISTS



SCIENTISTS FEEL HELPLESS

Sociologists dominant thought = postmodern

(“Science and Technology Studies”)

ACTIVISTS: ORGANIZATIONS & “SCIENTISTS”

“CITIZEN DEBATES”

RESEARCH DISCONTINUED

RETRACTION OF POLITICIANS

RESEARCH CONTINUED

(without marketing, ex. grapevine INRA Colmar) to “produce knowledge”

VIOLENCE “LEGITIMATED” BY DEBATE

(“STATE OF NECESSITY” : “scientists” had warned of the dangers during debates!)