

SCIENCEWISE REPORT AIMS TO PROMOTE POLICY DISCUSSION OF WHO OR WHAT IS 'THE PUBLIC' IN PUBLIC DIALOGUE

During summer 2013, the UK Government's national centre for public dialogue in policymaking around science and technology, Sciencewise published a policy report written by Alison Mohr, Sujatha Raman and Beverley Gibbs from the Institute for Science and Society. [Which Publics? When? Exploring the policy potential of involving different publics in dialogue around science and technology](#), aims to stimulate discussion among policymakers and other stakeholders about how we should understand 'the public' in public dialogue to help improve the prospects for public dialogue and clarify how it can make a valuable and legitimate contribution to good governance involving matters of science and technology.

The report challenges the widespread assumption in policy-making that the people brought together in dialogue events must constitute a representative sample of the wider population. Drawing on the lessons learnt from prominent public dialogue activities, the report emphasises how the publics involved in dialogue might differ from the publics the organisers thought they were engaging with. Thus, it is important that dialogue processes remain open to the unexpected inputs which arise because publics act or respond in different ways to the particular circumstances of a dialogue. The report proposes a typology of multiple, dynamic 'publics' capable of mobilising around shared interests and highlights ways in which each of these publics might play a role in public engagement for good governance, but in somewhat different ways.

The report was officially launched during a webinar hosted by Sciencewise. Over 40 people including policy-makers/civil servants/social researchers, dialogue practitioners and academics, from the UK and internationally, participated in the event.

A recent editorial in [Ingenia](#), the magazine of The Royal Academy of Engineering, drew on a key message of the Sciencewise report to recognise the different character of the many publics that make up British society to highlight the importance for the engineering profession to become more visible and more active in engaging with the genuine concerns of multiple publics on complex national infrastructure projects.