

NEWSLETTER – July 2020



This is the quarterly Newsletter from AsSIST-UK. The Newsletter is sent to all registered members of the Association. Please ensure your contact details are up to date, and if they have changed, contact the Executive Secretary, Andrew Webster at andrew.webster@york.ac.uk

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For all ongoing news about the Association visit the website at www.assist-uk.com

Executive Committee News

The EC met four times since our last newsletter. The main items for discussion were the plans for the STIS and Covid-19 Workshop and the meeting relating to Responsible Research and Innovation. We also announced the A-UK Annual PhD Prize for 2020.

STIS and Covid-19 Workshop:

The Workshop on June 18 was regarded as a very valuable meeting with over 80 attendees. The Panellists raised a wide range of issues which need to be addressed within the field, and showed how they are exploring these in their current work. We also were able to find others working in this area and they have sent in a brief summary of their research which we hope will encourage collaboration across projects. The full report is available on the website at <https://assist-uk.com/report-on-the-assist-uk-webinar/> and a recording is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MattzeH8MWA>. The Association also drew on the

outcome of the Webinar to send a submission to the Government Office currently seeking proposals for near-term research (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest>) relating to Covid-19. A key issue missing from the current list on the GO paper is that one of the challenges of the contemporary pandemic situation is finding ways to negotiate lifeforms that are difficult to live with but no longer possible to disentangle from, i.e. the virus, and so being in a learning situation not only of how we live, but how we wish to live. The line taken in the government document in the section on 'Trust' is solely about prevention, eradication etc.

Report on STIS training in RRI:

The Engineering and Physical Science Research Councils (and UKRI more generally) recently required that students at their Centres for Doctoral Training receive research training in the area of Responsible Innovation. AsSIST-UK coordinated a Workshop in collaboration with and hosted by **Jack Stilgoe** (UCL).

The meeting brought colleagues involved in delivering research training and supporting RRI in UKRI/EPSRC CDTs across 12 Higher Education Institutes: Bristol, Edinburgh, Exeter, Kings College London, Imperial College, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield, UCL.

Participants shared a wide range of experiences and highlighted key institutional and pedagogic challenges. Though it is not feasible to capture all aspects some key messages emerged.

The arrangements for delivering RRI varied greatly between institutions. For example UCL has 13 CDTs, administered with a standard framework, which had provided the basis for creating a new post in RRI. In other institutions there were different arrangements for various CDTs. Colleagues were generally promoting concerted provision across CDTs and postgraduate programmes to achieve economies of scale and networking benefits. Some CDTs had requested bespoke provision – for example Applied Modelling CDT at Edinburgh University] and the Synthetic Chemistry CDT at Imperial, as they sought inputs shaped around their substantive topics and broader framings. These activities cut across HEI's largely discipline-based resource management structures. Their dispersal across different schools and faculties could pose challenges in securing resource streams needed to create new posts/ sustain delivery. Though the institutions represented were able to draw on expertise within their own institutions, it was noted that some organisations buy-in external RRI and related training.

CDT students have heavy science and engineering workloads and may be anxious about being invited to engage with social science dimensions and approaches. They may feel overwhelmed and thus unwilling to do non-credit bearing work. The experience of the SynBio is that RRI may best emerge through bottom up establishment of constructive relationships with students and their supervisors rather than making it a mandatory part of research training.

Formal research training is often provided at the outset when its relevance would become more salient later in the PhD journey as students contemplate the application of their

research and engaging with external players users/industrial partners/wider publics (eg in co-design activities). This was addressed as students developed RRI plans in the course of their projects in year 2-4. RRI was delivered through a range of methods including formal lecture based courses and through small group work (e.g. around values in design and co-design). It would be useful to consider teaching methods and also intended learning outcomes.

RRI scholars are keen to go beyond simply offering service teaching and to undertake some kinds of action research. This might seek to establish whether RRI activities are making a difference in terms of the socialisation of science and engineering (eg attitudes and orientation of students and supervisors). A central feature of this community is an emphasis on reflective practice and many colleagues have been actively considering the conflicts and contradictions that may accompany these efforts. Thus scholars in the field are concerned to avoid being cast into a particular role (e.g. of running ELSI assessment or public engagement exercises). This may be facilitated by creative engagements between specialists in Science, Technology and Innovation Studies, with cognate groups in Law, Ethics, Business Schools and also more widely – for example the creative engagements with artists (eg the Synthetic Aesthetics project with Synthetic Biologists) – let alone technical specialists in STEM subjects.

Future meetings are planned with a view to establishing a network devoted to this issue. **Please do contact Robin Williams, A-UK Chair, if you are interested in joining this initiative.**

A-UK Annual PhD Prize for 2020:

The EC was delighted to announce this year's Doctoral Prize was awarded to Dr **Aaron Amankwaa**, from the Department of Applied Sciences at Northumbria University. His thesis contributes towards our understanding of the dynamics of technology governance and theoretically interrogates the overlapping areas of the social embedding of technology in both STS and innovation studies

News from Centres:

Sustainability, Technology and Innovation Research (STIR), University of Greenwich

Director: Anne-Marie Coles

Research on science, technology and innovation studies has been ongoing in the Business School at Greenwich University since 2010, although the Sustainability, Technology and Innovation Research group (STIR) was established two years later. Our primary objective is to investigate how social processes facilitate embedding and cultural resilience of new technologies.

Theoretically we have drawn critically on concepts such as innovation networks, sustainable transitions and large technical systems. At the micro-level we are interested in identifying intentions, actions and discourses of actors participating in socio-technical change.

STIR currently has two core themes, 'Sustainable innovation and enterprise' and 'Science, technology, innovation and culture'. Work on the first theme covers the areas of electric mobility, energy system renewal and the relationship between innovation, sustainability and place. Specific projects have investigated cross-cutting topics such as the dynamics of infrastructure change, and factors that influence local actors in their adoption of new technologies. Current projects focus on issues such as the resurgence of tramways in Europe and sustainable regeneration of coastal areas in three European countries (more information can be found at <https://www.interreg2seas.eu/en/FACET>).

The second theme concerns production and consumption of socially situated technical knowledge. Projects have focused on international comparisons of small firms' innovation activities and the role of socio-cultural factors in industrial decline. In these examples focus was on elucidating dynamics of technological niche formation. Other projects have focused on the creative industries, such as the role of innovation in identifying novel opportunities for cultural entrepreneurs in George Town, Malaysia. In addition, this theme focuses on innovation in digital media, and the role of routines and techniques as means of knowledge transfer. For further information contact A.Coles@gre.ac.uk

Innogen

In March 2020, **Theo Papaioannou** was appointed Member of the Expert Peer Review Group on Evaluation at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The peer review group consists of external experts in different aspects of evaluative research. The aim of the group is to provide advice on the design and implementation of specific evaluations and on the research methods required to develop a robust evidence base for the Department's policies.

During April and May 2020, Innogen researchers have been applying their research skills to examine the socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. They have published various articles and commentary pieces on the influence of economics on public health policy, securing a globally fair distribution of vaccines, and on the importance of local health services and legal preparedness in the face of public health emergencies. These have been widely read and some have been picked up by national media (e.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/local-health-services-lack-the-tools-for-thiscrisis>).

This year, Innogen's co-director, **Joyce Tait** wrote a Publicly Available Specification on Responsible Innovation (PAS 440), that was launched at this year's BSI Standards e-conference in April. The guidance provided in this document is relevant to all innovative technologies and was created to help companies innovate responsibly, so they can achieve the benefits of innovation in a timely manner and identify and avoid any potential harm or unintended misuse of a new product, service, process or business model.

Events

Manchester Metropolitan University is pleased to invite you to an online book launch to celebrate the publication of “Responsibility Beyond Growth: A Case for Responsible Stagnation”, by Stevienna de Saille, Fabien Medvecky, Michiel van Oudheusden, Kevin Albertson, Effie Amanatidou, Timothy Birabi and Mario Pansera.

When: **30th July 2020** 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. British Summer Time

Where: via Zoom. Please go to <https://bit.ly/2O6cNQN> to register. The link for the talk will be provided to registered guests via email.

With Guest speaker: Professor Richard Owen: University of Bristol

Contributing speakers: Stevienna de Saille: University of Sheffield; Fabien Medvecky: University of Otago; Kevin Albertson: Manchester Metropolitan University; Effie Amanatidou: University of Manchester; Timothy Birabi: University of London; Mario Pansera: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Publications

Recent publications from A-UK Members:

Responsibility Beyond Growth: A Case for Responsible Stagnation (see Events above)

Innovation is generally considered to be the antidote to economic stagnation. But while the coupling of ‘responsible’ and ‘innovation’ has been much discussed, that of ‘responsible stagnation’ has gone largely unexplored. In this book, we take this concept seriously as a means to question the political economy of science, technology and innovation, both as policy and as process, and the problems which arise from unquestioned emphasis on innovation as the means to increase GDP. The book argues that examining what responsible stagnation might contribute opens new space in the growing global discussion about RI, incorporating innovation in non-market-oriented processes, goods and services which have strong societal benefit but do not necessarily contribute to GDP. It examines the conundrum of diminishing productivity returns and increased environmental and social hazards associated with attempts to increase GDP, and how taking a growth-agnostic approach contributes to recalibrating innovation around responsibility as its focal point. Drawing on insights from ecological and steady state economics, Science and Technology Studies, and social innovation across the world, this interdisciplinary group of scholars questions how the growth paradigm shapes and limits the innovation space, and how decoupling innovation from growth points toward myriad possibilities for facilitating human well-being in more environmentally and socially responsible ways.

Available with pre-order discount from: <https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/responsibility-beyond-growth>

For more information about the **Fourth Quadrant Research Network**, go to <http://fourthquadrant.org>

Papaioannou, T. (2020) 'Innovation, Value-neutrality and the Question of Politics: Unmasking the Rhetorical and Ideological Abuse of Evolutionary Theory' *Journal of Responsible Innovation*, Vol.7, No.2, pp.238-255.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/IDTYWYCVGFYSITYSKHKU/full?target=10.1080/23299460.2019.1605484>

Andrew Webster and Sally Wyatt (eds) *Health Technology and Society: Critical Inquiries* (2020) Palgrave Macmillan.

This book celebrates and captures examples of the excellent scholarship that Palgrave's *Health, Technology, and Society* Series has published since 2006, and reflects on how the field has developed over this time. As a collection of readings drawn from twenty-two books, it is organized around five themes: Innovation, Responsibility, Locus of Care, Knowledge Production, and Regulation and Governance. Structured in this way, the book gives the reader a concise but nonetheless rich guide to the core issues and debates within the field. Complementing these narratives, the original authors have provided new reflection pieces on their texts and on their current work. This then is a book which in part looks back but also looks forward to emerging issues at the intersection of health, technology, and society. It uniquely encompasses and presents a range of expertise in a novel way that is both timely and accessible for students and others new to the field.
<https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9789811543531>

Andy Yuille (Sociology, Lancaster University) 'Performing legitimacy in neighbourhood planning: conflicting identities and hybrid governance' in *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*.

The paper explores the ways in which legitimacy is produced in an experiment in democracy in the UK, with resonances across related fields investigating the international trends towards localism, participation and co-production. 'Neighbourhood Planning' allows community groups to produce statutory land use plans, a power previously reserved for certified experts under the direction of elected politicians. Its promoters portray it as a straightforward transfer of power from state to community. This paper explores how the process rather produces new, unsettled instantiations of community. Operating alongside the structures of formal democracy, the groups taking up these powers rely upon complex, hybrid forms of representative, participatory, and epistemological authority to establish their legitimacy. These modes of authority are generated through the performance of multiple identities that structure relations between the groups and the communities that they speak for. Three distinct, partially conflicting identities are characterised. Each identity is associated with particular material relations, types of knowledge and ways of representing the neighbourhood, and consequently each produces different forms of legitimacy. This analysis can aid understanding of the practices through which legitimacy is achieved and contested across a wide spectrum of localist and participatory initiatives.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2399654420925823>

David Tyfield, Rebecca Willis and Andy Yuille of Lancaster University are **inviting submissions to a special issue of Sustainability** on 'Bringing Governance Back Home — Lessons for Local Government regarding Rapid Climate Action'. There is a growing recognition both that rapid action on climate change is urgently necessary, and that many of

the responsibilities for this action (e.g., around transport, land use planning and economic development) rest at a local level. This is attested to by the growing number of local authorities internationally that have declared climate emergencies. This Special Issue will explore the responses of local government across the world to the need for rapid climate action. We are particularly interested in the lived experience of local politicians, officers and those engaging with them in adapting to this challenge and driving the response. While questions of technical solutions and policy design for rapid climate action have been well studied, little attention has been paid to the crucial question of how such outcomes might be implemented, by whom, and how action is enabled or constrained by the institutional and other sociotechnical relations in which these actors are embedded. We welcome contributions that will address this gap in the literature by exploring the practical necessity for smaller, more human scales and modes of governance, while grounding normative speculation about models of governance in the empirical and power realities of doing local climate governance in practice. Deadline for manuscript submissions: 31st January 2021. Full details at https://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability/special_issues/government_climate_action. Responsibility Beyond Growth: A Case for Responsible Stagnation (see Events below)

New Projects

Andy Yuille has been awarded a one-year ESRC postdoctoral fellowship at the Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, starting October 2020. This will develop his PhD research, drawing on STS theories and methods to explore how neighbourhood planning in the UK works as an 'experiment in democracy', opening up ways in which the democratic claims made for neighbourhood planning could be strengthened and informing research across inter/disciplinary fields that are concerned with emerging forms of participatory and localist governance.

Catherine Will (University of Sussex) has been awarded funding by the Wellcome Trust to examine mobilisation on antimicrobial resistance with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health, working across policy, science, clinical practice and voluntary sector advocacy and activism. The project will also include responses to Covid-19 in the data collection and have been benefitting from the wider understanding of health inequalities that has come out of the debates around ethnic minorities deaths.

Occupational mobility

Catherine Montgomery has recently taken up an appointment as a Research Fellow at the Centre for Biomedicine, Self and Society, the Usher Institute - University of Edinburgh.