## P67 – Methodology workshop

## Exploring practices through the use of narrative interviews

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**Abstract**: The paper gives an outline of the PhD-project *Performing Ethical legal and social aspects* (PerformE), and presents methodological challenges related to it's research questions*.* The last decades the demand on scientists to act responsible and accountable, and to consider ethical, legal and social aspects of their work, has increased. On a European policy level these demands have manifested as *Responsible research and Innovation,* now established as a cross-cutting issue in Horizon2020. The starting point of PerfomE is the understanding of such initiatives as efforts to embed emerging technologies in society through regulatory activities, and the objective of the project is to explore the interface between regulation and self-regulatory activities in R&D. In this regard the paper presents methodological challenges of exploring research practices through interviewing, and discusses a possible operationalization of one of the project's main research questions.

**Keywords**: ELSA; RRI; regulatory activities; governmentality; methodology: interviewing

## Performing ethical, legal and social aspects in emerging technosciences

When the Human Genome Project started in the early 90s, funding programs to promote research into ethical, legal and social aspects (ELSA) of emerging technologies were co-initiated to confront societal issues imposed by technological development and the novel questions raised by the advancement of life sciences (Zwart, Landeweerd, & van Rooij, 2014). Today we see a similar effort in European science policy to steer research, with Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) established as a cross-cutting issue in Horizon2020. Pushing towards an integrated and interactive research practice, RRI has been introduced as the new mechanism to link innovation closer to socio-economic challenges, and resting on a positive basic attitude, it aims towards a co-evolution of science and society (Zwart et al., 2014, p. 13). The general claim is that science should answer to societal needs, and the demand on researchers to act responsible and consider ethical, legal and social aspects of their work is thus increasing (Von Schomberg,

2013). In particular, large emerging technoscientific programs, such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, and synthetic biology, are the focus of this initiative.

Much previous research on ELSA and RRI has been on the interaction between the social and natural sciences, e.g. integration of ELSA or RRI components in large technoscientific projects to enhance reflexive work and responsibility (see Calvert, 2013; Calvert & Martin, 2009; Fisher, 2007; Fisher, Mahajan, & Mitcham, 2006). Though this research has produced important insights, we do not have a sufficient understanding of how science is actually performed in terms of meeting these new demands and which features may support or hinder engagement. The starting point of my PhD-project is to look at these programs, like the former ELSA-programs and now RRI, as efforts to embed emerging technologies in society through what may be broadly considered to be regulatory activities. My main objective is to explore the interface between such regulations and the self-regulatory practices in science, i.e. the interface between the *governance of* R&D and the *governmentality in* R&D (see Foucault, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992). In this way investigating the interplay between R&D, societal needs and science policies, the project will contribute to our knowledge of the practices and restraints of science, how scientists draw on ELSA and/or RRI considerations in their work, and the conceived do-ability of meeting the new demands of responsibility.

**The methodological challenge: exploring practices through interviews**

The empirical material in the study will mainly consist of data generated through semi-structured qualitative interviews with informants within four different field-sites,

i.e. nanotechnology, biotechnology, biomaterials, and nanomaterials in energy. One of the main methodological challenges I have encountered in my project is getting access to research practice through the use of interviews. My goal is to explore how science governance (in terms of both regulation and self-regulation) is actually performed with respect to ethical, legal and social aspects, and expose regulatory practices seen from the activities of the scientists. My operationalization of this research question have been to ask questions about the scientist's work, i.e. asking them to describe their daily routine, or the last week's work assignments. These questions has then been followed up with questions about if it makes sense to talk about responsibility in their work, what ethical sound and responsible science means in their daily practice, and if they expect their work to have an impact on society in any way. This approach has proven successful when it comes to exploring how the scientists translate the concept of ELSA or responsibility in general, how they experience their own responsibility in respect to ELSA and their considerations of such aspects of their work. Off course this is also an important constituent of my study, but often these answers appear obvious, and it is difficult to see what new knowledge is brought to the table. As my study wants to increase the understanding of the practices and constraints of technological development, to grasp if this perception of responsibility actually affects how science is practiced, and if so, in what way, is essential. My challenge is therefore to find a way to expose such responsibility work, methodologically, through the use of interviews.

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