



Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Politics of Science and Technology

discussant

Regula Valérie Burri, ETH Zurich & University of Basel



Imaginaries as theoretical concept

Appadurai (1996):

- practices
- individual and collective enterprises
- social facts
- central to agency

Marcus (1995), Fischer (1999):

- imaginaries are contingent



Jasanoff & Kim (2009):

Sociotechnical imaginaries as

“collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfillment of nation-specific scientific and/or technological projects”



Imaginaries are...

- cultural representations
- tools to anticipate futures and understand presents and pasts

Sociotechnical imaginaries are expressed as:

- visions of science in society
- expected profits and risks of S&T
- visions of S&T governance
- visions of science-society relationship (inclusion of citizens in assessment and governance of S&T)



Analytical questions

- What is the theoretical/analytical strength of “sociotechnical imaginaries” as opposed to other concepts (e.g., culture, visions, perceptions, meanings, discourse, logic, regime, ...)?
- Where is the locus / where are the places of imaginaries (local, translocal, national, transnational...) ? How do imaginaries include the global / the local ?
- How can the emergence, structure, and transformation of imaginaries be described?
- How do imaginaries circulate and travel, and how do they get translated by doing so?



- Are imaginaries always implicit or are they also (made) explicit?
- To whom are imaginaries addressed, i.e. what are their public(s)? How are imaginaries (re)produced and/or transformed by these public(s)?
- How do imaginaries shape practices (e.g., policies), and how are they shaped by specific (cultural) practices, or, in which sense are imaginaries practices (in Appadurai's sense)



- How are imaginaries related to power?
 - Imaginaries of whom are at stake (e.g., of state, company, citizens)?
 - Whose imaginaries are dominant/successful/ included, and whose are excluded?
 - What are the conditions/structures/logics/ rationalities that make imaginaries to be included or excluded? How do processes of inclusion/exclusion work?
 - Are imaginaries used strategically, and if so, by whom? Do they have to be explicit to be used strategically?



Methodological questions

- How can imaginaries be analyzed? On what level?
What should be focused?
- How can imaginaries be compared? (along what lines, what are the entities, etc.)



Normative questions

- Are there any counter-imaginaries, and if so, how can they be enforced/empowered?
- What is the role of STS in such endeavor?