

## Project fact sheet 3

# Citizens' dialogues on nanotechnologies

- 6 citizens' dialogues were organized in Austria, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland.
- The meetings brought together citizens, technology developers, civil society organisations and public authorities.
- Citizens' dialogues can help to attune technological innovation to the needs and concerns of citizens and stakeholders.

### Engaging in dialogue with citizens

NanoDiode organised a series of citizens' dialogues in Austria, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland in 2014-2015 as part of its overall programme to engage citizens and stakeholders in the societal debate on nanotechnologies. Citizens were invited to discuss their preferences directly with technology developers from research and industry, representatives from civil society organisations and public authorities: What innovation areas, applications or products would they welcome? What are the reasons for such preferences? What would the citizens want to know? What risks do they see?

The citizens' dialogues started with introductory presentations on nanotechnologies by representatives from research, industry and civil society organisations. The presentations introduced nanotechnologies and their risks and benefits and discussed why citizens should take part in their development. Moderated dialogue stations however formed the core of the programme. After short pitches by researchers and entrepreneurs, the participants discussed the applications and subjects of their interest directly with the people developing them.

### Key experiences

The NanoDiode citizens' dialogues succeeded in creating an open dialogue climate where citizens actively discussed nanotechnologies with stakeholders. The participants brought forward their own views and ideas: they were especially interest-

ed in the potential applications of the technologies, and how they could be developed for the benefit of society. They also gave recommendations for the provision of consumer information.

In a situation where nanotechnologies are not at the top of the public agenda, getting citizens to participate in their free time proved to be challenging. Factors that contributed to the attractiveness of the events included the choice for an attractive easily accessible venue, convenient timing, and a focus on real applications, products and questions of daily life.



German pilot workshop, November 28th, 2014, Stuttgart

The feedback from participating researchers, companies and public authorities was positive: they said that the dialogues taught them a lot about the

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*Citizens' dialogue, Katowice, Poland, 8 June 2015*

preferences of citizens and their ways of thinking. At the same time, the implementation of the outcomes of the dialogue needs to be critically examined. As NanoDiode organised its dialogues “from the outside” – NanoDiode planned the events and then invited stakeholders to take part – the dialogues lacked a clear mandate or role in the current work of technology developers. As a result, there is little evidence that the recommendations from citizens have been put into practice. The impact of the dialogues is probably more indirect: Thanks to the dialogues, different actors are now more likely to involve citizens and take aspects that are important to citizens into account in their future work.

### **Contribution to nanotechnology governance**

Live dialogues with citizens enable a deeper exchange of their hopes, concerns and questions. Dialogues enhance our knowledge of public attitudes, for instance from surveys: They allow a direct discussion with citizens on why they prefer one application of nanotechnologies to the other, how they think nanotechnologies should be communicated and how the public should be involved. Instead of discussing nanotechnologies in general, technology

developers, regulators and stakeholders have an opportunity to engage in dialogue with citizens on planned research agendas, policies or communication approaches.

The possible contribution of citizens' dialogues depends on their mandate and timing in the innovation process. Openness in terms of results, flexibility and responsiveness from technology or policy making organisations are needed if the dialogues are to truly contribute to nanotechnology governance. Citizens' and multi-stakeholder dialogues are most useful in early stages of technology development or regulatory policies: at this stage, products and policies can still be attuned to the needs and concerns of citizens and stakeholders.

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### **MORE INFORMATION**



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NanoDiode is a project for outreach and dialogue on nanotechnologies, funded by the European Commission.

From July 2013 to June 2016, NanoDiode has organised a range of engagement activities across Europe, involving stakeholders in a dialogue on the funding, performance and outcomes of nanotechnologies research.

The NanoDiode fact sheets present the different activities carried out as part of the project and discuss the main findings and recommendations. This is nr 3 of a series of 14 fact sheets, see: [www.nanodiode.eu/factsheets](http://www.nanodiode.eu/factsheets).



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