

***Response to Leonie van Drooge***

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It was with pleasure that I read [Leonie van Drooge's comments](#) concerning our paper in the Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective (SERRC). I should also add that I think that the SERRC is a great initiative, and I credit the editor (James Collier) and the editorial team at *Social Epistemology* for it.

For my taste, academic reviews are too often overly critical attempts to find holes in an argument; rather than an examination of what is good and valuable in a piece of work and building on it. To her credit Leonie van Drooge has done just that, and reviewed [the work in question](#) from the perspective of “what can I learn from this, and how can it be of use”... or to use her words: “what lessons could be learned from a policy point of view?” (2004, 19)? It was too my dismay that some of the policy implications of the work were not more readily visible/accessible, but thankfully van Drooge was nevertheless able to draw out some key points that were unfortunately “hidden” within the text. In the space that remains here I will build on van Drooge’s review to further discuss the prospective policy implications of the kinds of user/producer hybridity that we describe in our work.

To begin, I should say that I was very pleased to have someone from the Rathenau Institute (like van Drooge) review this work. For those of you who don’t know, the Rathenau is a Dutch body falling under the umbrella of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, which “promotes the formation of political and public opinion on science and technology. To this end, the institute studies the organization and development of science systems, publishes about social impact of new technologies, and organizes debates on issues and dilemmas in science and technology.” The Rathenau might be particularly obscure to non-European audiences, but their work is well [worth exploring](#). I should say that in the interest of full disclosure I was a research associate there from 2010-2013, but the work concerning user/producer hybridity that is in question here pre-dated my time there.

Aside from its warm place in my heart, my enthusiasm for the review being conducted by someone at the Rathenau is due to the fact that our work was very much directed at a policy audience. Knowing that it has reached someone there, and has been of interest and value, is itself a very good sign for us.

In her reflection on the policy implications of our work, it would seem as though van Drooge hits the nail on the head:

[W]hat lessons could be learned from a policy point of view? I realised that a potential contribution was hidden that the authors had not yet identified. This refers not so much to the scientific contribution [that

user/producers stand to make to diverse translational processes], as to the contribution to other users in the field of research policy (19).

I simply can't agree more, and again it is a shame that this was not made clearer in our work. That said, and in our defence, we most definitely had this notion in mind—amongst others—when we stated that:

This pivotal role played by users/ producers in key translational moments leads us to advocate for a greater appreciation of user/producer diversity, and for their more direct involvement in translations between utility and discovery. Our belief is that this position could not only work to answer this journal's call to guide 'contemporary knowledge enterprises', but also to re-orientate translational policies particularly in the area of health (3).

To be sure, one of our driving policy recommendations was the broadening of what translational science entailed, and the encouragement of integrating of user/producers into research with explicit translational goals. With that in mind, I could not agree more that user/producers warrant an increasing role in the development of research policy itself. This is particularly true for policy directed at translational outcomes, but it is also true for policy concerning the governance of novel techno-sciences like synthetic biology, nanotechnology, and the like. Rather than developing policy in a top-down manner, bring in those actors into the policy process for whom the policy will apply—be in translation or governance. The value that we highlight in the article would essentially still apply: actors who will eventually use a technology or a policy need to be integrated as producers upstream in the technological development or policy process. In the event that direct integration of user into the (policy) process is impossible, then this could alternatively be done by having a social scientists going and talking to them and then integrating their views into the policy process. While it is not an ideal alternative to direct integration, this is indeed much of the work undertaken by empirical science and technology studies (STS) scholars operating in policy circles.

I would only offer a final note of agreement with van Drooge, but on a different issue. She states that:

I would even suggest that the diversity [of translational processes] needs to be recognized by researchers themselves as well. It is our experience that researchers are not always aware of the process of, or their role in, the creation of impact (Spaapen and Van Drooge, 2011) (20).

While I think this is more or less true, it raises the chicken-and-egg conundrum of what came first: researchers' lack of awareness of the role they play in diverse forms of translation and various socio-economic impacts, or the research policy that only assesses a limited and particular set of impacts and forms of translation? To be sure, researchers also need to recognize the diversity of translational work that they do, but this needs to be

matched by an academic and research funding culture that invites reporting on a broader set of impacts/outcomes that go beyond publications, presentations, patents/ spin-offs, etc. What might be advisable is for research evaluators to start to ask about these alternative forms/variety of translation, because I would imagine that researchers are doing some of them, but given that they aren't being asked about it they are not reporting on it either.

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## References

- Douglas, Conor M.W., Bryn Lander, Cory Fairley and Janet Atkinson-Grosjean. "[The Roles of User/Producer Hybrids in the Production of Translational Science.](#)" *Social Epistemology* (2014): DOI: 10.1080/02691728.2013.848951
- Van Drooge, Leonie. "[Reviewers and Their Roles as Users/Producers.](#)" *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 3, no. 8 (2014): 19-21.