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**Participatory design and feminist interventions.  
Emancipatory potentials of public engagement.**

Some insights into participatory design and research in  
computer science

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# Public engagement?

- Science in public ↔ publics in science
- Lot of work in STS since *participatory turn* (Jasanoff 2003)
- Usually framed on policy level (cf. Lengwiler 2011)
- Non-scientists participate in facilitated debates
- Few notable instances where participation happens on level of technoscientific practices



# Some concepts

- Participatory design and research, primarily in:
  - Computer Supported Collaborative Work (CSCW)
  - Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)
  - Participatory Design (PD)
- Terminology:
  - technoscientific practices
  - technoscientific research
  - participatory design
  - participatory research



# Situating my research

- Hybrid identity:
  - socially aware computer scientist?
  - or technically interested social scientist / STSer?
- Inseparable entanglements:
  - Ethico-onto-epistemological issues (Barad 2007)
- *Participatory Design* as some form of common ground



# My research approach

- Situational Analysis (Clarke 2005)
  - of construction of publics in:
    - CSCW, HCI and especially PD
- Informed by:
  - feminist theory & critiques from informational & computer science and STS (Star 1991, Wagner 1994, Suchman 2002, Wyatt 2003, Bath 2006, ...)
  - STS research on public engagement (Kleinman 2000, Irwin 2001, Stirling 2008, Michael 1992 & 2009, Felt & Fochler 2010, ...)
  - Theories of publics and public spheres (Arnstein 1969 & 1975, Habermas 1974, Fraser 1990, Mouffe 1999, Benhabib 2002, ...)



# Research questions

- How are different publics constructed as relevant?
- How are they integrated into the research projects?
- Who gets to participate?
- When do they get to participate?
- What is the aim of letting publics participate in technoscientific research?



# Project status

- 5 interviews so far with PD researchers who conduct participatory approaches
- As well as reports and theory and method papers
- Theoretical synthesis of feminist theory / STS / ICT
- 3 more interviews will follow
- full analysis until September 2012
- final thesis until October 2012



# Researcher/Developers vs. Publics/Users?

- Traditional divide between users and developers
- Deconstructed esp. by critical and feminist researchers in STS and computer science

(Haraway 1991, Harding 1993, Suchman 2002, Wajcman 2004, Bath 2006, Barad 2007, ...)

- Participatory Design researchers in exchange with STS knowledges & practices

(Wagner 1994, Suchman 2002, Sengers et al. 2005, Bath 2006, ...)



# Participatory Design (PD) in Computer Science

- Originated from the Scandinavian approach to systems design in the 1970ies and 80ies
- Motivations:
  - Democratization of technology & 'better' systems



# Participatory Design (PD) in Computer Science

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- Motivations:
  - Democratization of technology & 'better' systems
    - “Better systems. I think this is a rather simple answer. To just develop systems that are really supporting their users. (...) What are better systems? Here we probably would say that this is only exposed in the use situation. Of course then value questions will be exposed.” (I2 R.14)



# Participatory Design (ctd.)

- Diverse forms of approaches
- Early participation of publics / stakeholders / users
- Participation facilitated through:
  - Prototypes
  - Mock-ups
  - Interviews, Observations & Ethnomethodology
  - (Future) Workshops & Focus Groups
  - and many more...



# Restraints on participation

- Early and ongoing participation should be achieved
  - but first the research endeavour has to be sketched out
  - and funding for the planned research has to be acquired
- → preframing of participation
- Preframing of publics also through:
  - only certain publics have resources to participate
  - only certain publics respond
  - tools, methods & spacio-temporal context
- Marginalization of participatory approaches



# Conclusions

- Why investigating PD from STS perspective?
  - Strong focus on participatory design, much less on participatory research
    - Potential for PD: engage in policy debates
  - Strong use of and engagement with STS and other social sciences & humanities; rich in experiences with participation on a practical level
    - Potential for STS & Co: rework our frameworks of participation
- Awareness for diversity of publics and conflicts in participation



# critique / feedback / advice



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this presentation including the transcript and full references  
will also be available on the blog

