Sustainable Anticipatory Governance: Understanding Resilience, Obduracy and the Long Term in Theory and Practice

Cynthia Selin

The concepts of anticipatory governance and sustainability have strong common objectives rooted in greater reflexivity, producing valuable societal outcomes, and care for future generations. Anticipatory governance arose as a conceptual framing in the context of technology assessment and the need to think about the broader ethical, political and cultural dimensions of socio-technical systems early and often—before systems become locked in and less amiable to change. Sustainability science also has a nuanced approach to transition processes with a normative commitment to futures thinking. Both approaches pay attention to rigidities in over-determined systems and seek levers for evoking change towards better outcomes. Path dependency, obduracy, long-term change and promoting societal learning are key ingredients consistent with both approaches. In spite of the similarities, the difference in focus of the two (technology vs. environment) may result in different research methods and ontologies. This panel will look into the similarities and differences in the concepts and work to articulate a coherent link between these parallel perspectives. We then will shift gears to describe the ongoing efforts in applying and testing both concepts through a collaborative research project between Arizona State University and the City of Phoenix planning department. We will explore achievements as well as challenges and suggest pathways forward that can be carried out in diverse settings.

Panel Participants and Papers:

David Guston – “Anticipatory Governance: A Strategic Vision for Building Reflexivity into Emerging Technologies”

Arnim Wiek – “Resilience, Sustainability, and Anticipatory Governance – Pieces of the Puzzle”

Jameson Wetmore – “The Challenge of Path Dependency and the Need for Anticipatory Governance”

Cynthia Selin – “Rethinking Urban Governance: Knitting together Foresight and Sustainability”