

# Mainstreaming RRI: towards a new social contract between science and society?

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CHALLENGES FOR MAINSTREAMING”*

Via Zoom

# I shall argue:

*That RRI can be mainstreamed*

by rethinking the relation between  
science and society:

resulting in a new social contract  
between science and society

# RRI can be practised at three levels:

1. In research projects
2. In institutes, labs, industries
3. In society

*I will focus at the 3<sup>rd</sup> level*

(→ social contract between science and society)

# The current social contract

(Wilhelm von Humboldt ,  
Vannevar Bush)

- Society invests in (pure) science
- Science will produce knowledge, leading to innovation and solutions to societal problems

High trust in science but without engagement

No direct link between politics and research

Funding only through general, non-thematic programs

# Some observations of recent developments through an RRI-lens (mostly in The Netherlands) :

## Anticipation:

- Covid-19 pandemic generates questions about how to imagine a different (and better?) post-
- Radical policy interventions during Covid-19 pandemic make people realize that wild imaginaries may not

## Inclusiveness:

- The Dutch *National Research Agenda* (100 M€uro/ye)
  - Dutch citizens have formulated this agenda
  - Research is required to involve stakeholders and future knowledge
- Weekly 'technical briefings' in parliament by scientists on national TV

## Responsiveness:

- Theory of Change + Impact Pathway allow and require researchers to change the course of their research in response to early findings
- Dutch schools were closed down while government acknowledged that this was because of public demand and without scientific ground

## Reflexivity:

- Virologists between parliament and research
- Politicians re-value the role of scientific advice

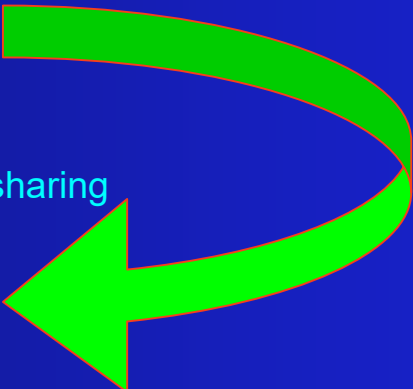
This is not based on proper comparative research, but rather a series of local, particular observations

# Lessons from the pandemic

- We live in technological culture and are inevitably vulnerable
- Democratic state authorities must move away from their neoliberal roots
- Science and technology became better recognized for their potential *and* their limitations

However,  
all acknowledge that  
politicians should hold  
the helm and take  
responsibility for  
steering the nation's  
course  
*(no technocracy!)*

# Towards a new social contract

- Trust in science, but no blind trust:
    - Recognizing inevitable uncertainties
    - Engaging with research and its planning and consequences
  - Involvement of citizens and stakeholders:
    - Setting the research agenda
    - Executing research and using its results
    - Open-science style of quality control and results sharing
  - Mixed research funding:
    - General, non-thematic
    - Guided by societal challenges
  - More prominent and public role for science to support policy—however:
    - Scientific advice is different from scientific research
    - Science advice is strongly independent
    - Democratically elected politicians should always have final responsibility
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***RRI can be mainstreamed into such a new social contract between science and society !***