

SPRU Training Course: Innovation Policy in a Changing Global Context

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Day 1: Innovation Democracy

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The language of innovation is everywhere. The more seriously it is taken, the further the implications beyond traditional narrow science and technical preoccupations. If the promise is to be realised in the face of pressing global challenges, then the realities of innovation need to be considered very carefully.

First, innovation is as much about institutions, practices and cultures as it is about technology. Second, innovation in any given setting is a branching evolutionary process, not a one-track race. So much existing policy language about ‘forging ahead’ or ‘catching up’ is actually seriously misleading. Third, large-scale long-run directions for innovation tend to owe much more than is typically credited to collaborative relations and political dynamics encompassing civil society and social movements than to the usually-highlighted expert-led and competitive market processes. Fourth, there are many crucial dimensions of power that need to be illuminated and analysed, in order to understand why – or whether – innovation in particular sectors might better proceed in some trajectories than in others.

Drawing on an analysis undertaken for the UK Chief Scientist’s report on innovation policy, this talk will also link with some of the issues addressed in concrete practical steps in the accompanying talk on multi-criteria mapping (MCM). It will explore concrete ways in which institutions involved in science and technology policy might broaden out and open up their appraisals of alternative possible research and innovation pathways – and so help foster outcomes that are not only more democratic, but also more effective and robust in addressing global challenges.

