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Submission to the Conference Focus on:

**Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects of Human Genetics and Agricultural Biotechnology**

Title:

Talking Ethics in Technology Controversies

Abstract:

The discourse about ethics and technology is usually dominated by philosophers and ethicists. Consequentially, prevalent issues in this discourse are, for example, what kind of ethics is needed to control research and what the limits of an ethically legitimised technology are. However, focusing on technology controversies it becomes obvious that ethics gains new significance.

Today, we have to recognise that ethical and moral categories have become politically significant. They are part of many governance discourses, in particular those where technology conflict management is of importance. So, many conflicts about technology are conducted with explicit reference to ethics and morality, rather than exclusively or primarily in categories of risk – as was (and is) the case for technologies such as agricultural biotechnology or nanotechnology.

What are the consequences for technology governance if ethics has become the main semantics of governance? With regard to publicly contested research areas such as biomedicine I will show that ethicisation is associated with changes in expectations which affect both the way of legitimising political decision-making as well as science in its advisory capacity. If technology controversies are negotiated mainly in terms of ethics (and not, for example, in terms of risk), i.e. if ethics has become the relevant governance semantics, politics as well as scientific expertise will be affected: the legitimisation of political decisions is challenged, expertise production is taking other forms, and lay citizens' participation as a way of producing complementary expertise becomes more important.