

Modes of Social Science Engagement in Infrastructure Design

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Abstract

We ask, how does the organization of a technology building project impact collaboration with social scientists? We identify four elements that have structured collaborative engagements of social scientists within information infrastructure design projects. The elements we identify are (i) the state of the project relative to its development timeline; (ii) the time of initiation with social science, (iii) the participation type for social science; and (iv) the details of the involvement. Drawing from ethnographic research and grounded theory methodology, this research is based on comparison of three information infrastructure projects. We argue that the varying configurations of these elements substantially influence the possibilities for social science contributions to each project. In planning future engagements of social science within infrastructure projects careful consideration of such elements will serve to open up engagement options beyond a frequently encountered ‘response mode.’ Our goal is to enrich and deepen awareness of modes of engagement where social research is participatory.