In the previous chapter we dealt with ‘the objective world’ that science and experts investigate. The main conclusion was that the scientists and the experts certainly have their proper roles to play, but which issues they address in their investigations and how the results are used in policy-making are value-laden aspects that must be made transparent for the sake of democracy. This leads us to a closer look into what we mean by ‘values’, their relevance in technological choices and how they relate to emotions and interests. This is a very complex area that concerns for example philosophers and psychologists (what values and emotions really are) and political scientists (how they are taken care of in the political process). Being an amateur in these areas, I am unable to give anything approaching a comprehensive overview of these research fields. The aim of this chapter is much more limited: it gives my view on how the world can be structured for increased awareness and transparency in policy-making. It thus lays the foundations for the forthcoming chapters where we go deeper into certain complex and controversial policy areas and for the ideas presented later in the book on how awareness and transparency can be enhanced.

What do we mean by values?

Values are beliefs about goals in life that are desirable for an individual or for society. As individuals we maintain our values across situations; when we are at home, at the office or with friends. In the words of John Burton, Australian diplomat and academic who devoted his life to conflict resolution, values can be defined as follows (Burton, 1990):

Ideas, habits, customs and beliefs that are a characteristic of particular social communities. They are features that lead to separate cultures and identity groups. Values are not for trading and changing values is a long process.
Some values are shared by almost everyone, others are cultivated within certain social groups. Experts, for example, are people rooted in different contexts, ranging from the social context where they were brought up and where they live, to the expert culture in their professional area, the larger commercial culture, and often the ivory towers of academia.

There are several possible angles adopted by philosophers when it comes to analysing values. The American philosopher of science, Helen Longino delineates values as contextual and constitutive. Contextual values are defined by Longino as ‘personal, social, and cultural values, those group and individual preferences about what ought to be done’ (Longino, 1990, p. 4), whereas constitutive values are related for example to the goals of science, such as truth, accuracy, simplicity, predictability and breadth. According to the Israeli psychologist Shalom Schwartz (see e.g. Schwartz, 1992, 1994), people’s values are organised in hierarchies of relative importance. These relations are crucial to decisions we make. They motivate choice of behaviour, justify our past behaviour, serve as standards by which to evaluate people and events and direct attention and perceptions. For example, if values of achievement and stimulation have higher or lower priority for you than security and benevolence, you will make different choices in life, and you will probably also prefer different alternatives in societal issues.

Our values are not only stable across situations but also over time. They form during childhood and become stable in adolescence. In adulthood they normally change only slowly, but can change more rapidly in response to dramatic experiences, such as the death of a partner, sudden poverty or therapy. They can also change in a long-term perspective due to general societal developments in which technology plays an important part. The language of values is socially approved goals. However, they may also serve interests of individuals, groups or both, an aspect to which we shall return shortly.

In areas driven by technology, values are often hidden in the policymaking process. This may be so because some values are supposed, perhaps erroneously, to be so deeply held and commonly shared that they appear to require no articulation. It is also possible that experts in scientifically sophisticated areas more or less unconsciously induce certain values in their assessments by selecting which issues to address, and (more importantly) which ones not to address. Technocratic and regulatory cultures may actively discourage the discussion of values, partly because they do not have the mechanisms by which to deal with them. The explicit articulation of values may also be against the interest of agenda setting organisations, including industry and NGOs.

For high quality policy-making we should exert ourselves to create a broad framing of alternatives and issues to be explored so that no matters of importance are neglected or forgotten. If, as is often the case, the agenda is set by the ideas and beliefs of an expert community, the frames for investigating alternative solutions and for risk assessment are set too narrowly. Certain issues