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At first sight, it might seem odd to contrast planned with non-planned research: In a certain sense, all research is planned, for research is a goal-directed activity. Though the successes of science, a gain of knowledge and successful applications alike, often depend on serendipities – we find something we were not looking for – it is far from clear that not looking for anything increases the chances of serendipities. So, drawing a distinction between planned and non-planned research is often meant to address the question of *who* is to decide on the research agenda: the individual researcher, the leader of a research group, funding institutions, the public, etc.

The freedom of young scientists to pursue their own research agenda depends on their institutional autonomy; the degree of autonomy differs widely depending on position held (member of a research group, assistant professor, independent research fellow, etc.) as well as on the resources needed. But equally important, the freedom is restricted by disciplinary aims and trends of research. Having to decide between addressing socially relevant issues and pursuing scientifically/disciplinary relevant research, young (i.e., not tenured) researchers can hardly be expected to prefer the former. (This is not to say, of course, that there is generally a trade-off between social and academic relevance.) A particularly important criterion of scientific problem choice is only to tackle problems that are (supposed to be) soluble; thus, a reasonable way to enable young scientists to work on socially relevant questions is to keep possible conflicts of social and scientific relevance in mind when deciding on the scientific agenda.