



Boosting public and societal engagement

The current policy brief is the second one out of three that will be published during the PE2020 project. This policy brief has three aims: 1) it describes how we conceptualise public engagement, 2) it introduces a model of public engagement that supports dynamic and responsible governance of research and innovation and 3) it presents the lessons learned from seven pilot projects of the PE2020 project. Policy implications are included. Discussions at the policy conference will be utilized in the development of concrete policy recommendations that will be sent to the conference participants in early December 2016.

WHY IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

The quality, capacity and legitimacy of European science, technology and innovation need to be boosted. In order to do this, new governance tools and working methods are needed for public and societal engagement of science. Such tools and instruments are necessary for us to solve the wicked problems that challenge researchers, among other societal actors.

The aim of the PE2020 project is to answer to the challenge by developing the necessary tools to boost public and societal engagement of science. The project set out to expand the capacity of European and national science policy actors to integrate better, more effective societal engagement into science policies and practices.

Innovative PE refers to new participatory tools and working methods that can contribute to a more dynamic and responsible governance of R&I.

Public and societal engagement of science is claimed to have only limited impact. It has been seen as merely an inward-looking exercise that has little to do with the surrounding society and the practical problems that need to be solved. In the PE2020 project we openly challenge these claims. We re-examined the approach to studying societal

and public engagement of science. We wanted to find the core of what constitutes successful PE and the key instruments that promote the use of successful methods.

WHAT WE DID?

The goal of PE2020 was to identify, analyse and refine innovative public engagement tools and instruments that support dynamic governance in the field of Science in Society (SiS). The work focused on contextualizing the role and functions of PE with the aim of boosting transferability of governance innovations.

These aims were approached by splitting the work into four phases:

1. We started by analysing the current system, situation and trends. Based on this we developed a conceptual model that provides a systemic approach for the study of engagement between science and its stakeholders or the public.
2. We then created an updated inventory of current and prospective European PE innovations. This formed the basis for testing.
3. Next, we co-planned context-tailoring workshops with seven pilot initiatives and traced best PE practices and processes. All of these were related to the grand challenges of the Horizon 2020.
4. Finally, we developed net-based PE design toolkit that is accessible to use by all



interested in public engagement activities. The toolkit helps identify, evaluate and transfer innovative PE practices in Europe and beyond. It works as a practical tool for researchers and stakeholders.

We analysed innovative PE from the perspective of participatory performance. This means that we set active collaboration between researchers and stakeholders or the public as a prerequisite. In practice it entailed tracking activities that contribute to the capacities that are needed for dynamic governance of science. Such capacities are anticipation, reflection, transdisciplinarity and continuity.

WHAT WE FOUND?

The evidence produced by the PE2020 project shows that innovative public engagement has truly versatile impacts. These are not limited to Research & Innovation (R&I) activities only, but include positive effects on the working environment, politics and individuals. It is not merely an additional task that takes time but gives little in return. Instead, our evidence shows that innovative public engagement produces new resources:

- **Practical goods**, such as changes in attitudes and ways of understanding issues
- **New capacities**, such as professional skills, methods and platforms of collaboration
- **Mobilisation of human resources** for addressing scientific and societal challenges, such as public awareness, social acceptance, political commitment and research funding

Promoting PE means giving more weight to the interests of citizens and societal stakeholders outside the scientific community. Engagement with societal stakeholders and the public allows them to influence the definition of current and future research needs. Simultaneously, it makes the societal relevance of research more visible to researchers. Engagement provides actors

outside academia access to the production process of scientific knowledge and hence the possibility to utilize the knowledge already during the process itself. Critical reflection is created through active and continuous interaction.

Public engagement produces new resources, enhances capacities and increases awareness.

As a result of a changing environment, which places active involvement with societal stakeholders at the core, the researchers have responded with creativity. The funding programmes have provided the applicants with ground rules but left them much room for creative, out-of-the-box solutions for how to engage in practice publicly. The space for creative thinking and open testing can be seen as a prerogative for the positive attitude of researchers to prosper and be turned into functioning working methods.

A major contributing factor of successful PE is a process that encourages commitment from researchers and partners alike. Initial workshops enable researchers to examine critically who their central partners could be and what type of societal impact they strive for with the project. Joint workshops are a channel and tool to engage with stakeholders and partners from the very start of the project. It is crucial that the consortia – consisting of researchers and stakeholders – create a joint commitment to a shared cause, and identify goals that they can all commit to. This allows space for scientific, practitioner and ‘field’ expertise and joint creativity to flourish within the project, while supporting openness to using new methods.

A clear characteristic of innovative PE is that it involves a relatively high – but manageable – variety of actors. Successful PE rests on combining and utilizing knowledge across sectors and types of institutions. Researchers in charge of PE activities often have a background that consists of experience from



several types of employers and tasks. They combine their professional skills and networks creatively, making use of the trust accumulated by long-term cooperation. Civil society organisations ranging from expert NGOs to interest groups and industrial ones are increasingly represented. In addition to a strong third sector involvement, we also found a 'fourth sector', which is composed actors or groups whose foundational logic is not in the representation of established interests. Instead, their social cooperation functions through hybrid networking, and utilize the skills of eg. field experts or randomly selected participants.

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS?

Resources and training are needed to strengthen the skills and capacities of researchers and societal stakeholders (eg. public officials, private sector representatives, civil society actors). New skills are needed to identify the right kind of stakeholders, to work in a goal-oriented and strategic manner, and to facilitate open discussion and reconciliation of conflicting interests between collaborators. Capacity development is necessary for researchers and stakeholders alike.

Interaction between researchers and stakeholders needs to be continuous in order to be effective. Continuity is the key to sustaining a dynamic approach in governance as exchange of views is heavily dependent on mutual trust. Continuity in the interaction between researchers and the broader society can be supported through multi-level communication (local, national, international), multi-actor collaboration (public, private, third sector, individuals) and by embedding research in policy planning through long-term cooperation. The drizzling of knowledge between researchers and stakeholders throughout the process allows knowledge and

ideas to flow freely in manageable format and size. This type of engagement creates linkages between different types of institutions and ecosystems.

Public engagement and societal interaction should be included as one of the key demands of research funding programmes. A constructive attitude at the programme (funding) level trickles down to individual research projects, which in turn can improve the quality, awareness and effectiveness of the activities in research projects. The programmes that encourage research projects to enhance continuous public engagement tools provide a safe platform in which to try new ways of collaborating with external stakeholders.

Public engagement activities should be evaluated and followed up. Engaging with societal stakeholders can help citizens understand e.g. societal and environmental changes better, and thus act as civic capacity building. It can support public offices, business and organisations develop their working methods and procedures, and help them assess the implications of decisions and actions better. External stakeholders tend to participate when they see that there is something real at stake and that their participation matters. When evaluating public engagement activities, focus should be on not only policy implications but also on effects on institutional development.



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