



Public Engagement for Research, Practice and Policy – Introducing a New PE Toolkit

This policy brief is the last of three published by the PE2020 project. The policy brief has two aims: 1) it presents the main conclusions from the policy conference *Public Engagement for Research, Practice and Policy*, and 2) introduces a *PE Toolkit* for the support of future public engagement processes.

CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND POLICY

The conference *Public Engagement for Research, Practice and Policy* was held on 16-17 Nov. 2016 in Brussels, at the premises of the European Committee of the Regions. The purpose of the conference was to discuss best practices of public engagement (PE), and to identify common European priorities on how to stimulate societal engagement for sustainable innovation.

The conference discussed how new forms of PE could to support responsible research and innovation (RRI) in the European research area. In particular, following questions were asked: How to ensure effective societal engagement in the design and implementation of new research projects and programmes? How to improve the incentives of research agencies to advance PE? How to develop new capacities needed in a transition toward more responsive culture of science in society?

DEMAND FOR REFLECTION ON PE

The conference attracted over two hundred registered participants from highly different institutional backgrounds, such as academia, funding institutions and business, which proved that there is indeed demand for policy level reflection of PE. The sessions included

Conclusion 1: There is demand for policy level reflection on PE.

lively debates that continued and spread in social media.

The presentations and discussions brought forth the idea of a rapidly changing research landscape. They revealed some worrisome trends, such as the spread of anti-scientific tendencies in national political discourses, cuts in European research budgets, and global socio-environmental challenges. It was recognised that there are increasing interests for reorienting research towards strategic, interdisciplinary applied research, applying academic criteria in research evaluation, and co-designing research processes with citizens and users of knowledge. The discussions led to a conclusion that in a situation where the research landscape is transforming intensively, the better alternative is a conscious transition rather than an unguided drift.

Conclusion 2: Better a transition than an unguided drift.

COMMITMENT TO PE

The EU has a strong commitment for public engagement through its RRI policies. National funding agencies are revising their funding schemes. Universities, governmental funding agencies, and foundations increasingly support challenge driven research. Internet and social media applications makes it possible for ordinary citizens to adopt roles as 'citizen scientists', hackers, and environmental activists. All these trends have contributed to the emergence of the so called



‘fourth sector’, i.e. actors and groups of actors whose foundational logic is not in the representation of established interests, but rather in participation to social cooperation processes through ‘hybrid networks’. The fourth sector is becoming more pronounced in the field of R&I, and it can be governed through PE processes. PE is thus no more a matter of whether but rather a matter of how.

Conclusion 3: PE is not a matter of whether; it is a matter of how.

FACILITATING CHANGE

In order to facilitate the change of the research and innovation landscape, it is necessary to show to different stakeholders the benefits of PE. Likewise, there is a need for moving from the focus on individual PE events to broader structural issues, where separate PE processes are better linked and embedded in the established structures of R&I policy, such as national research funding agencies and their research programmes. Gender policies and Social Corporate Responsibility (including its ISO standards) serve as positive analogies of the change ahead. Institutional transformation could be supported by changing funding criteria, introducing stronger policies, establishing new institutions and developing capacities that support PE becoming a part of dynamic and responsible governance of research and innovation.

Conclusion 4: Giants’ steps to institutional transformation can be taken through structural measures.

NEW MODELS OF PE

New models of public engagement are continuously being developed, such as combination of face-to-face events with web-based deliberations. A real challenge for the research community is to find ways to combine high-quality science with PE. Citizen science and crowdsourcing are two examples where

top level research has successfully met with involvement of citizens and civil society actors. Additional ideas can be gathered from the research community by requesting them to develop plans for societal interaction, not only dissemination. European research and innovation could also benefit from new, self-sustaining models of PE, based on mutually beneficial collaboration across institutional domains such as research, science communication, policy, innovation activity. In addition, stronger business models underlying PE activities (e.g. PE as new type of innovation platforms) would be beneficial. New models can best be introduced through piloting taking place in real contexts and enabling deeper learning.

Conclusion 5: Learning on new PE practices takes place through piloting.

OPENNESS

As the research of PE2020 has suggested, innovative public engagement can effectively contribute to the three guiding principles of the EU’s RRI policy: Open Innovation, Open Science and Open to the World. Recent changes and turbulences in the European policy landscape suggest that public engagement is not only about harmonious co-design of research. It is also about publics and stakeholders challenging research and research institutions. This calls for the inclusion of fourth O, namely, ‘Openness to conflicts’, which means better sensitizing of the public administration to the openings from the civil society.

Conclusion 6: Public administration should be sensitized to the openings from civil society.

MAKING PE STRATEGIC

The conference also gave the opportunity to present the PE2020 Toolkit on public engagement with science and technology, and



to get first feedback from the participants. Overall, such an exchange and the conference outputs as a whole confirmed the urgent need for making PE the core of a broader strategy aimed at providing science and innovation with a more robust and reliable societal basis. This entails finding the way for rapidly embedding PE in the relevant current practices of European research institutions activating appropriate institutional change processes through specific action plans and measures. However, it is misleading to think that, once research institutions will be open to public participation, this latter will automatically occur. To favour participation, there is also the need to make public engagement a current social practice, which people are able to understand, support and practically experience.

PE is therefore to be embedded also in society, which is possible only by creating the social and institutional spaces both within and outside research institutions, where the actual exercise of citizenship in science and innovation may become real.

Conclusion 7: Public engagement should become a current practice both in research institution and in society to be effective.

institutionalized through brokerage institutions, competence centres and linking of new PE/ RRI schemes with existing research and funding structures.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- PE can produce new kind of evidence base for policy making.
- Better functioning PE practices can best be supported through strong policies, including new funding criteria, evaluation standards and activity targets.
- Citizen science projects and challenge oriented strategic research processes should be further explored, because they can support high-quality research.
- Best PE practices, including societal interaction plans, should be piloted under the forthcoming FP9 funding scheme.
- PE can support socially responsible research. This development should be



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