

Public Engagement – What’s next?

This is the sixth and final policy brief from the Engage2020 project. It presents the key findings about future engagement practices, and recommends measures to deepen and broaden public engagement within the European research and innovation landscape.

Engaging with societal actors and civil society is a key element of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), and in the efforts of doing science with and for society.

Horizon2020 has taken significant steps in supporting RRI and engagement. However, the capacity of key actors for mainstreaming engagement practices in R&I is still weak in terms of experience and knowledge of approaches and methods; in terms of embedded practice; and in terms of resources, platforms, training systems and communities, which can support a mainstreaming effort.

“[...] societal engagement should not only alter the face of research but also improve public confidence and support in research and innovation, lead to more creative and real-world inputs, improved policy decision-making and the development of more appropriate, effective and robust solutions.”

Claudia Neubauer, Fondation Sciences Citoyennes¹

Engage2020 has developed three types of mutually supportive outcomes for strengthening the societal engagement in R&I, based on a global mapping of policies and methods for engagement.

Firstly, the project has scanned and prioritised a set of **policy options for widening and deepening the engagement practices in European R&I**. These are presented in this policy brief and they cover

- Engagement methods development
- Capacity building
- Mainstreaming

Secondly, Engage2020 has developed an **entry-level introduction to engagement**, aimed at researchers, research institutions, funders, government and Commission services, and other actors around research and innovation. The anthology provides the background for understanding the rationale, need and principles of engagement practices, and thereby makes the reader ready for stepping into action around engagement. The document is available in interactive eBook and PDF formats.

¹ The interviews with the persons cited in this policy brief can be found in the Engage2020 Anthology at www.engage2020.eu

The third outcome is an **online engagement method selection tool**, aimed at researchers who need to implement engagement activities in their project proposals. This ‘Action Catalogue’ tool (<http://actioncatalogue.eu/>) makes it possible to select the qualities needed in a method and receive a prioritised list of almost 60 well-tested methods. Each method is described to a level where the user is able to evaluate what using the method means for the project work plan, resources/budget and for the composition of the project consortium.

“If you are working for societal change you want to involve society. That is the core element of why we should engage more, in more structured ways and using more creative approaches.”

Hans Bruyninckx, Director of European Environment Agency

Engagement is not a new development. Public engagement methods have been developed and used across the world during more than 30 years. We now know that participants - being consumers, citizens, employees, patients - are fully capable of engaging very competently and constructively in engagement processes on very complex topics. We know that these methods travel well – both geographically and institutionally. And we know that they can bring knowledge, normative clarification and new action, which could not be made in other ways.

However, engagement practices have not yet made their way into the domains of research and innovation in large scale, even though strong evidence points towards significant benefits by doing it systematically.

Engage2020 has taken important steps towards a much wider use of engagement in R&I and it is the hope of the consortium that the outcomes can help those who want that to happen across Europe.

WHY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

Societies in Europe today face challenges which need to be overcome in order to ensure the ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive’ growth envisioned in the

Europe 2020 Strategy. These challenges have been outlined in the Horizon2020 Framework for Research and Innovation.

The 'Grand Challenges' can only be tackled effectively if a wide range of societal actors are engaged in the process. Many policymakers acknowledge efforts to give the public a role and a voice in science and technology (S&T) policy-making and programme development that fosters socially robust and sustainable decision-making.

There is growing awareness of the importance of embedding engagement directly in the process of research and innovation, as well as in the process of research definition. The input of multiple actors into research activities are increasingly being recognised as vital for advancing scientific knowledge – for example through citizen science projects and in project design and definition through science shops. Bringing science and society closer together makes science more relevant, more inclusive, reflexive and responsive to societal needs.

„[...] public engagement is a significant dynamo of democracy and it has huge potential as a mechanism for facilitating mutual understanding between citizens and their elected political rulers.“ Innes Newman, Former member of Sciencewise Citizen Group

ENGAGEMENT METHOD DEVELOPMENT

The method mapping conducted by the Engage2020 consortium has identified almost 60 engagement methods in use world-wide in different settings and fields. The mapping reveals a great variety of approaches currently used to engage societal actors and citizens in R&I.

Besides the well-tested approaches new elements are often incorporated in existing methods and new innovative approaches are designed. Digital engagement is one of these emergent fields. Digital technologies allow citizens to engage in various stages of R&I processes, such as in gathering, visualising and processing data. They also allow a large number of geographically dispersed participants to take part, can reduce costs of engagement processes, and they may encourage young people to participate. However, digital engagement cannot replace the qualities of face-to-face in-depth deliberative conversations needed to bring deeper insights, reflection and shift of position. Digital engagement



risks excluding those without internet access or digital literacy. Therefore, what seem to be most needed is **developing 'blended methods'**, which allow for in-depth face-to-face deliberation but at the same time take advantage of the opportunities new technologies provide.

Evaluation is critical to improve engagement processes. Interim and final evaluations improve the understanding of the process, the pitfalls and the opportunities to maximize their impact.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The skills of researchers, engagement practitioners, funders and public research authorities needs to be improved in order to make meaningful and widespread engagement possible.

Building knowledge of public engagement practices within public authorities, universities and other stakeholder groups is a critical step towards a wider societal impact of science and technology. **Inclusion of public engagement in the curricula** of higher education and secondary schools will contribute to societally relevant research and innovation outcomes. **Tailor-made training of users** would benefit scientists, public actors, CSOs and other interested parties, improving their understanding of engagement. In order to foster public engagement across Europe, **pairing schemes** between already established and less experienced users/institutions would be of great benefit.

Public engagement in Europe today occurs in siloes. There is only scarce communication between engagement practitioners working in different arenas. This prevents practitioners from learning and developing. Supporting the development and operation of **European and national communication and collaboration platforms**, facilitating the exchange of knowledge between participation practitioners from the different fields, is essential. If we are to foster better societal engagement there is **a need for an 'engagement community'**, where all types of practitioners and users can make mutual learning and improve their practices.

MAINSTREAMING ENGAGEMENT

The future looks promising for engagement in R&I. Nevertheless, more efforts are needed to *broaden* engagement – to underperforming countries and to sectors where engagement is rare – as well as to *deepen* public engagement in R&I institutions to become part of everyday practice.

Participation and engagement is **relevant for the whole ‘food-chain’ of science and society relation:**

- Science, technology and innovation policy-making and governance
- Programme development and research funding systems
- Steering of research and development of scientific institutions
- Execution of research

Mainstreaming is a complex process involving both horizontal mechanisms across this food-chain and vertical, specific to each level of the food-chain.

Infrastructures and institutions

New cultures of engagement need to be promoted and nurtured, both within research institutions and authorities. Building supportive infrastructures, codes of conduct and promoting the integration of engagement in the institutional ethos will be vital.

The European Research Area (ERA) is a core axis for achievement of the political aims of European research and innovation, including renewed growth and improved quality of public spending on research and innovation. Participative approaches, which foster the link between science and society, thus, need to be regarded as **an indispensable part of the further development of the ERA.**

Public consultations in the process of **formulating R&I visions for Europe** and in designing research clusters and programmes should be part of the process. It would be useful to foster the societal responsiveness of ERA by including **civil society organisations in the ERA stakeholder platforms** and in the European Technology Platforms. Setting up a **European platform for Public Engagement** in R&I, co-owned by the EU, member states and civil society organisations, could identify concrete steps towards opening the European Research Area to the European public.

It is essential to **draw on and support existing experience, knowledge and institutions.** Engage2020 clearly has shown that there are numerous good

practices and successful initiatives and actors in Europe, which could be important actors in the mainstreaming of engagement in European R&I. In the area of policy making and policy advice, it is important to draw on the highly advanced experience of European Technology Assessment (TA) institutions. Existing infrastructures for collaboration between researchers and societal actors, such as science shops, can also serve as ‘mainstreamers’ across Europe.

Encouraging institutions to embrace engagement as an indispensable part of responsible R&I practices and policy-making would imply supporting public authorities and researchers with practical expertise in selecting and implementing the various engagement methods. **Platforms and competence centers** can be a source of this support to practitioners.

Establishing **citizen science contact points** on a national and/or regional level for citizens interested to actively take part in research would lower the threshold for researchers to begin experimenting with crowd science practices.

“Research is not carried out in a vacuum – research needs to inform society but research also needs to be informed by societal needs, concerns and aspirations therefore engagement with society is vital.” Jackie Hunter, Chief Executive of Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

Funding and incentives

There should be a **systematic reflection process on the need and relevance of engagement in specific calls** issued by the Framework Programmes of the European Commission, allowing for a broad and targeted inclusion in European research. The inclusion of **‘societal impact’ as a criterion** in the evaluation of research programmes would promote collaboration with various societal actors in research and innovation projects. On a project level, the **need for engagement should be made explicit in calls for proposals** so that applying consortia can plan their composition, work plan and project budgets accordingly.

Non-conventional funders, such as unions, consumer interest groups, and charities **can play an important role in encouraging public engagement.** There are many successful examples from across Europe, demonstrating the positive effect these organisations can have when taking leadership in promoting engagement in research and innovation.

A major obstacle for CSOs to participate in R&I processes is that they often lack the institutional structures required for completing demanding application procedures. Their scarce organisational resources make it difficult to finance the involvement of their staff in engagement activities and support the development of project proposals. **Supporting CSOs financially will allow them to take part in the proposal stages.** Another measure to achieve better representation of civil society groups and interests in research, is to **launch open calls for CSOs** to formulate issues, which cannot otherwise be easily addressed.

Communication and promotion

Awareness about the benefits of engagement for society and for European research and innovation needs to be raised at all levels. **EC engagement in creating media coverage** of engagement activities will make objectives and achievements known beyond the directly involved groups and organisations, contributing to impacts in wider society. Establishing an **annual EU award on public engagement** would further contribute to promoting engagement among all important actors.

Currently, most engagement practices at universities are conducted in social sciences. Engagement, however, needs to take place in other research pillars as well. **Promoting interdisciplinary, problem-oriented and community-related research in academia** will help diffusing the practice of engagement to all disciplines. Furthermore, **scientists need to be rewarded** for engaging actors affected by their research and innovation activities. In order to promote the exchange of experience and ideas among researchers, practitioners and policymakers, **public engagement scientific journals and conferences** need to be initiated and supported.

ABOUT ENGAGE2020

Engage2020 is a project funded by the European Commission (DG Research) that looks at research, innovation and related activities, and explores how members of society are involved today and how they could be involved in the future.







The core ambition of Engage2020 is to increase the use of engagement methods and policies by mapping

what is practiced and to spread awareness of the opportunities amongst researchers, policy makers and other interested parties.

Among the core deliverables of the project are:

- An Anthology eBook which provides an introduction to public engagement in R&I.
- www.actioncatalogue.eu – an online tool that helps users find the most appropriate method for their purposes.
- In-depth reports on the scope of public engagement, current and promising praxis of engagement in R&I, and policy options for supporting engagement in R&I.
- Six policy briefs synthesising the status quo and potentials of societal engagement in research and innovation.

To learn more about the project, its deliverables and partners involved, visit the website <http://www.engage2020.eu>. For further inquiries, please contact the project coordinator or any of the partners in the Engage2020 consortium.

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