

Societal Engagement – Policy and Practice in the Future

This is the fifth policy brief out of the six that will be published during the Engage2020 project. It presents several current and emerging trends in practices for societal engagement in research and innovation and lists a number of policy options targeting policy makers at the European and national level, as well as research funders, academic and higher education institutions.

In recent years, participative methods have gained in popularity across Europe. This trend is evidenced in the increased interest in citizen science approaches, as well as the increased number of science shops across Europe. Besides the traditional approaches to engage the public in research and innovation (R&I) policy making and actions, there has been a trend towards incorporating new elements in already existing methods (for instance, including digital technologies in their methodology) and designing innovative approaches, which serve previously unaddressed needs. Public engagement is a field in rapid development and for this reason it is important to consider what the likely trends and developments might be in the future.

The drivers for new developments in engagement include: i) the rise of multifaceted societal challenges, such as climate change and obesity, which call for the involvement of a wide range of expertise to find solutions; ii) the need for increased flexibility, as well as the involvement of traditionally marginalised groups, in order to improve the effectiveness of policies for the society at large; iii) the need to gather more information to be able to anticipate future challenges and risks; and iv) the use of new digital technologies that allow for engaging the public in a more timely and cost efficient manner.

These developments have further promoted the shift away from formal top-down science governance towards more networked forms of governance. A major demonstration of this trend was the move towards Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), which should also be understood within a broader context with its focus on inclusive, anticipatory, reflexive, and responsive RRI actions.

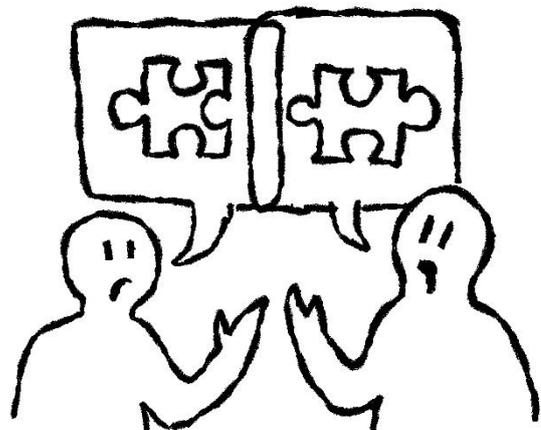
PUBLIC AND SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

In 2014, two expert workshops and two webinars were conducted as part of the ENGAGE2020 project, aiming to identify and explore the possible trajectories for societal engagement methods and practice in the future. Some of the key highlights from the discussions

at the conducted workshops and webinars are presented briefly in this policy brief. These include:

Working across siloes – Currently public engagement happens in siloes. For example different schools of practice rarely interact; deliberative engagement practitioners rarely learn from citizen science and vice versa. Moreover, there is only scarce communication between engagement practitioners in the field of science and practitioners working on public engagement in other fields. These siloes could be overcome by applying existing methods in new settings or by combining different methods in one hybrid process.

There is no pressing need for new methods – A wide range of engagement methods currently exist and there is limited benefit from developing completely new ones. Rather, the challenge is to utilise the methods already developed in various settings and in a more effective and efficient way than to develop new participatory approaches. The Engage2020 website has an action catalogue which contains over 50 methods of engagement (<http://engage2020.eu/>).



Graphics by: Edward Andersson

Innovations are needed before and after the formal engagement process –Engagement processes often fail for a number of reasons, including insufficient preparation of participants and decision-makers or insufficient consideration of how the outputs of the process would be taken forward. One way to increase the impact of engagement activities is the establishment of networking mechanisms which connect participants throughout the process of method's implementation and beyond its completion.

Clear feedback with citizens on the use of the results obtained by the application of the participatory method is required - Participants usually do not know what will happen with the results of the participatory events. Commitment and clear communication with the participants from the start are necessary for motivating citizens to take part in engagement events as it builds trust between them and the organisers. Trust is important for ensuring effective engagement and investing time and efforts in building trust is crucial. Further research on what motivates participants to attend engagement events would be of great benefit for improving the outcomes and impact of methods' implementation.

Digital engagement is important but not a panacea – Digital engagement cannot replace all face-to-face interactions, especially in-depth deliberative conversations. However, digital innovations can have a valuable contribution to engagement processes, such as in the process of gathering, visualising and processing data. They also allow engaging a great number of geographically spread participants and often make the engagement process cheaper.

Methodological innovations and policy innovations go hand in hand – Engagement is not only about choosing the right engagement methods, but also about developing the right policies to support engagement. Engagement methods shall be part of day to day practice when it comes to science policy making, programme development and research activities. New ways of thinking and working, as well as a cultural change and policy action will be required for pursuing successful engagement processes.

FIELDS OF PRACTICE OF INTEREST TO ENGAGE2020

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative methods have found use as a valuable way to obtain informed public views around complex issues. Yet, except for a few select areas, such as Technology Assessment, they are rather unknown. Often

deliberative engagement is seen as too expensive and time consuming by policy makers, who shun initiating participatory practices. CSOs, research institutes and other actors might also lack sufficient resources to apply engagement methods. This, to a certain extent, could be dealt with a 'distributed' model of deliberation, where the organiser provides the event format and questions, but the event is actually run by and with some resources of a third party. Trainings of researchers on a national and institutional level on when and how to apply deliberative method would be another effective measure to improve the preparedness and skills of university staff in organising or contracting engagement processes.

A combination of structured and unstructured processes is considered as an effective way of improving the results achieved in the engagement processes. While structural approaches (i.e. participants are selected by the organisers and the event is structured and run by the organising body) allow for greater predictability and control of deliberation results, unstructured approaches can have a wider outreach to the public and provide unexpected but important new views.

Digital engagement

The inclusion of digital technology in societal engagement processes has been both championed and criticised by experts in the field. The need to develop online approaches that work well with traditional face to face engagement methods is, however, generally agreed on. Digital technology might replace some existing forms of deliberation in the future, but it is abundantly clear that digital developments could enhance what is already present today.

Citizen science and participative research

Citizens are increasingly being involved as direct contributors to the R&I activity. In citizen science projects, for instance, citizens are often involved in data gathering and categorising. Within citizen science there is a significant scope to allow citizens to shape the research or co-create scientific results beyond the existing practices. More emphasis needs to be put on participant driven processes rather than processes driven by institutional agendas in the future.

Scientists often lack key resources, such as time and knowledge, to engage citizens into participative research. A facilitating structure for coordinating and supporting these processes could reduce the burden on individual scientists and organisations. Furthermore, a joint platform will allow exploring the opportunities for

closer collaboration and exchange of experience between related fields of practice, such as science shops, service learning and citizen science, which can be of great benefit for the involved actors.

User-led innovation

Innovation has often been a closed field, dominated by experts, with only limited role for the users, mostly used for market research. Over the last years, however, the engagement of users in the creation of new products and processes has significantly increased, as demonstrated by the growing numbers of hackathons, challenge prizes and crowdsourcing across Europe. However these approaches are often carried out piecemeal. Areas in need of further work include: the acknowledgement of citizens' efforts involved in user-led innovation and the establishment of quality criteria to ensure that the processes develop genuine innovation and treat participants fairly.

TOWARDS A SYSTEM OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Despite the increased use of participative methods in the R&I system, a supportive community of practitioners is required to facilitate the connection between institutional actors and promoting the closer link to formal governance and decision makers. This would support the shift from the current system of risk aversion towards a more visionary system of science policy making. An important step is to build a vibrant community of core supporters within the policy making field at both EU and national level, as well as establishing structured support mechanisms for building capacity among researchers, which would nurture the establishment of a fruitful community for engagement practices at all stages of the research cycle.

For engagement to reach its potential within RRI new policies are needed. For example: i) setting up a panel/separate body that will support institutions in organising deliberative events; ii) developing a platform which will provide information on where deliberative events will take place; iii) establishing hubs for participants in engagement processes, where they can stay in touch with each other; and iv) developing a platform for researchers who are interested in deliberative methods, as well as facilitation networks, where different institutions can both share and benefit from facilitation expertise and insights.

POLICY ADVICE

In order to develop the fruitful avenues for engagement in the future a number of steps need to be taken. The

policy advice developed with experts at the workshops and webinars which took place as part of the Engage2020 project include:

EU level

- Develop programmes to support new approaches which apply societal engagement methodologies across multiple European countries and/or combine different methodologies.
- Develop programmes to explore pioneering the use of online and digital methods in addition to face-to-face engagement methods.
- Develop a database of results of past engagement exercises.
- Provide funding for different kind of developments, such as: online structures for engaging participants before and after engagement processes.
- Support an EU platform to facilitate and coordinate different types of engagement activities, as well as an exchange of knowledge and experience among practitioners.
- Incentivise research into what motivates people to participate in engagement methods in different countries.
- Support pilot projects in citizen science and science shops.
- Establish requirements in EC funded initiatives for providing feedback to participants and tracking impacts beyond the respective project's completion.

National governments and research funders

- Develop new programmes to support the development and funding of distributed models of deliberation at national levels, focussing in particular on how structured processes and unstructured processes could best be combined, with a focus on influencing real funding decisions.
- Encourage the creation of public engagement units at universities and other R&I institutions.
- Set up programmes to fund and support more participative citizen science, in particular cases where more drive and motivation comes from participants rather than from institutional agendas.
- Look over the reward/promotion scheme within R&I structures and higher education to ensure that there is support for engagement.
- Create structures and opportunities for the exchange of experiences/ knowledge between

science shops, citizen science, service learning and other fields of practice.

- Set up a programme of funding for co-creation of projects including citizens, CSOs and other parts of society.
- Explore the opportunities to crowdfund citizen engagement projects.
- Explore how to link everyday engagement in councils, health service etc. to science decision makers; for example by linking research funders to ongoing engagement structures.

Academic and higher education institutions

- Promote training for researchers in how and when to apply deliberative methods.
- Develop support structures (including toolkits), ethical frameworks and case studies to promote and facilitate the use of engagement methods by scientists.
- Explore setting up internal specialist units within higher education institutions that can provide engagement services rather than using external organisations, which can often be more expensive.

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, perhaps more importantly, how they could be involved in the future. The project maps how, where and why members of the public, stakeholders, consumers and other groups are being engaged in the research process, from early policy development to the delivery of research activities.

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.

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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