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The International Science Shop Network

PERARES
Public engagement with research and research engagement with society

POLICY BRIEF

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO RESEARCH STRATEGIES

Experiences and Attitudes of Research Funding Organisations towards Public Engagement with Research with and for Civil Society and its Organisations - A PERARES Report.

The European Commission funded PERARES project (Public Engagement with Research and Research Engagement with Society) aims to establish a deeper and more systematic engagement of research bodies - such as universities, research councils, Science Shops and others - with civil society groups in setting research agendas, and to advance this by transnational exchanges of experience and mutual learning. One element of this work has been to better understand the experiences and attitudes of research funders across Europe towards public engagement with research with and for civil society and its organisations.

The present results should enable research funders throughout Europe to better assess the options to take PER (Public Engagement in Research) activities up in their strategy and thus contribute to European policy and the future of the European Research Area (ERA). It does this by giving an overview of experiences and attitudes of research funding organisations in different countries towards research with and for civil society and its organisations. This type of research engagement can make civil society a partner in identifying and responding to the "Grand Challenges" of our time to which European research should respond according to the Lund declaration.[1] The Ljubljana process, which aims to make European research more effective, calls for an improved governance of the ERA, involving universities, research organisations, and civil society.[2] More equitable access to science and technology, and more response from civil society to science and technology are necessary to achieve the ideal of a knowledge society capable of sustainable economic growth and greater social cohesion.

It should be noted that this report focuses solely on the experiences of research funders and therefore does not examine whether or how CSOs themselves feel they have been – or should have been - involved in research funding. Interviews took place in the UK and Ireland in spring and summer 2012, in Germany and the Netherlands in late 2012 and France in early 2013 whilst further information was also gathered from Canada, Romania, Italy and Spain and the European Commission. The Monitoring Policy and Research Activities on Science in Society in Europe (MASIS) reports provided background information on the situation across Europe[3] and this research seeks to add another layer to this work which examined Science in Society in 38 national reports from a range of European countries.

[1] Lund Declaration, Swedish Presidency, July 2009
[2] Council of the European Union: Council conclusions on the launch of the "Ljubljana Process"– towards full realisation of ERA, Press Release, Brussels, 29-30 May 2008.
[3] www.masis.eu

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Key Findings

- A wide range of terms are used to describe engaged research with civil society organisations. This has an implication for levels of understanding of research partnerships amongst research funders. For example community engaged research or bürgerbeteiligte Forschung is used in Germany whilst in the UK Public Engagement with Research is the accepted terminology. Some countries are still developing an adequate terminology to describe this work.
- There are national and international commitments to research partnerships and an emerging interest in examining and spreading out models of good practice in research with and for CSOs.
- There are many models of good practice across Europe of research funding organisations supporting research with and for CSOs and building infrastructure to support this work, some of which are explored below (and pp 117-123 in the full report).
- Even in countries where there is less of an understanding of research with and for society, there is some interest in how this is done in other places. When research with and for CSOs was explained, interviewees from research funding organisations often expressed an interest in the concept.
- These models are often isolated and lessons learned do not necessarily feed into the larger research funding structures, nor (with some exceptions mentioned here) are they generally exchanged at a national or cross national level.
- In many countries the healthcare sector and the agronomical sector in particular have led the way in engaged research with and for CSOs.
- Research with and for CSOs often does not fit into structures of applied research. Firstly, research funding policy to support applied research is often related to income generation rather than research with and for society. Secondly, funders reported that there is still a perceived tension between the understanding of academic excellence (in curiosity driven research) and social relevance, leading to some resistance amongst academics to the idea of engagement.
- To date, European funding programmes have represented the only significant mechanisms for supporting EU-wide coordination and collaboration in Science with and for Society research. The actions supported have already made, and will continue to make, important contributions to both the understanding of problems and the development and widespread dissemination of effective solutions.[4]
- Several correspondents to the MASIS report note that the framework programme as sole vehicle for accelerating efforts, because there is no funding (Hungary, Cyprus, Sweden) or insufficient funding (Czech Republic) available on a national level within the area of Science in Society or mention an undeveloped SIS research culture (Ireland) as the explanation for this tendency.[5]
- Horizon 2020's focus on Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) is acting as a driver to encourage research funders to consider research with and for civil society. It was explicitly mentioned in this context by funders in the UK, Ireland and Germany.
- Research funders felt that to get a better understanding of research with and for CSOs they need information to improve understanding and knowledge of methodologies for research with and for CSOs and structures to support this work. They suggested that this need for understanding also applies to the majority of researchers.
- Where funders have developed policy and practice to support research with and for CSOs, there has been strong leadership which has enabled changes in structures, support and funding.
- Where models of funding are shared, interesting practice develops. For example, the PICRI funding model and the 'Researchers-Citizen' programme in some French regions were based on the Canadian CURA programme, which allowed the organisation and implementation of complex and innovative research and fostered the mobilisation of knowledge towards participants. The CURA programme itself, in turn, was inspired by the Dutch Science Shop model.
- Another good model, at the European level, is the FP7-funding scheme 'Research for the Benefit of Specific Groups – Civil Society Organisations (BSG-CSO)' which allows CSOs find responses to their needs. This scheme was inspired by both the Science Shop model and the CURA programme.

[4] technopolis [group] & Fraunhofer ISI (Dec 2012): Interim evaluation & assessment of future options for Science in Society Actions, http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/executive-summary-122012_en.pdf, last accessed 4.11.2013

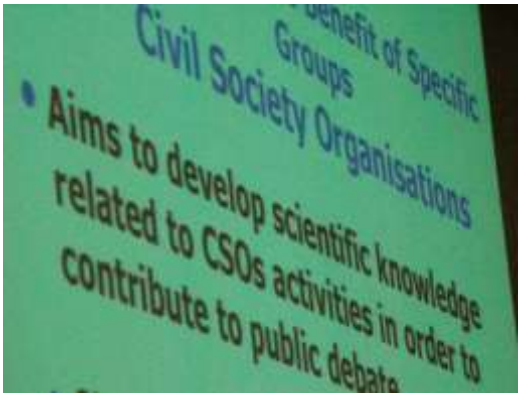
[5] http://www.masis.eu/files/reports/monitoring-policy-research-activities-on-sis_en.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,534,691, p.57

- There are also good models for supporting culture change and sharing practices, such as the National Coordination Centre for Public Engagement in the UK, or competitions such as 'Mehr als Forschung und Lehre' initiated by Donors Foundation for German Science.
- Some funders suggested that there was a need to ensure visibility for and support research with and for CSOs activities. Institutional mechanisms such as Science Shops[6] may offer one way to ensure visibility for this work. Even in countries who had a strong commitment to carrying out research with and for society, it was acknowledged that this process is still in development and further lessons need to be learned.

Summary of Country Reports

Experiences varied across the different countries. In the United Kingdom and Canada and increasingly within the European Commission itself, there is a strong policy context for research funders in supporting public engagement with research. In Germany and the Netherlands there is also support amongst some funders for engaged research but at a less embedded level. In France there is an increased interest in the involvement of CSOs in research at both the local level and especially at the regional level. The new law on the organization of higher education and research also opens several modest possibilities in the science and society landscape. In Romania the new National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation (2014-2020) is expected to involve stakeholders from "civil society, social partners, etc." including CSOs. In Ireland, Spain, and Italy, the infrastructure is still being developed, however there is interest amongst funders in how to move forwards in this field.

The main **United Kingdom (UK)** research funding agencies, notably the Research Councils, and the national funding councils, have worked together to build a vision for a research culture that values, recognises and supports public engagement. Public engagement is now written into research funding policy at all levels and in interview, funders confirmed that this will continue for the foreseeable future. A shared set of priorities and a shared language for this work have been developed alongside an overall strategic framework. Funders have made an explicit commitment to public engagement via the *Concordat for Public Engagement*, and have encouraged Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to make a similar commitment by signing up to the *Manifesto for Public Engagement.* Funders have also put in place a range of resources to encourage and enable academics to participate in research which will have a social or economic impact. For example, RCUK (Research Councils UK, the strategic partnership of the seven research councils) has developed guidance for researchers to help them understand the routes to economic and societal impacts in the form of *Pathways to Impact.* Alongside the Wellcome Trust and the national research funding councils, RCUK also co-funded the *Beacons for Public Engagement* and the *National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement*, both of which seek to support and embed culture change in HEIs. More recently, RCUK has funded eight *Public Engagement with Research Catalysts* across the UK. The key research funders are therefore encouraging research that shows evidence of public engagement and public benefit. This report finds that whilst the



infrastructure has been established at a policy level, this is still in the process of being translated to practice and some funding agencies have a much clearer remit for working with Civil Society Organisation (CSO) sector than others given their disciplinary areas. However more recently, UK rhetoric at governmental level has been heavily focused on economic rather than social impacts. It will therefore be important for UK CSOs to ensure that they take the opportunities currently being offered.

[6] The mission statement of Science Shops (by that or any another name) is: A Science Shop provides independent, participatory research support in response to concerns experienced by civil society. Science Shops use the term 'science' in its broadest sense, incorporating social and human sciences, as well as natural, physical, engineering and technical sciences. Science Shops seek to: provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education; provide their services on an affordable basis; promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology; create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations; enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society; enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and

Public engagement in research in **Ireland** is still in early stage of development. With a few exceptions, research funders agree that there is little experience of incorporating the needs of CSOs into funding streams and little co-ordination across funding agencies in this field. However Ireland's recent economic difficulties have led to a renewed strategic focus on research as the engine of innovation and the cornerstone of a knowledge economy. There is an emphasis on research which delivers direct benefits both to the economy and to society. This was confirmed in the 2011 National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 and in the Research Prioritisation Report which stresses research with potential economic benefits.

Several key Irish research funders stated that they were exploring methods of engagement to ensure that research demonstrates both economic and societal impact and there is an interest in building capacity amongst Irish researchers which will assist them in accessing international research funding, particularly through Horizon 2020. Irish funders expressed an interest in and a willingness towards taking this agenda forward and to work with other research funders across Europe to do so.

In **the Netherlands** part of the government responsibilities for research funding is carried out by intermediary funding organizations such as Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) which is the main funder of research in the Netherlands and receives 500 million Euros per year. Research with participation of CSOs doesn't appear to play an explicit role. Scientists and researchers focus on the scientific criteria of publishing. Some interviewees reported that the scientists find the structures to integrate CSOs in research insufficient. It doesn't seem to be clear why and how to take the research questions from the CSOs into account. To ensure the quality of the research, the national research funder focuses more on valorisation than on incorporating the needs of CSOs in research. However participation of CSOs in research plays a stronger role in a number of health care projects and there is a growing interest among patients and patient organizations to talk about the content and organisation of the scientific health research.

In **Germany** for many funders as well as for many scientists community based research continues to be a relatively unknown form of scientific work. On the other hand they expressed that from their experience citizens wish to an increasing extent to be included in scientific decision-making processes dealing with the societal challenges of the present day and demanded that more should be done to conduct research in this manner. But industrial foundations, organisations

primarily concerned with basic research, as well as community foundations, have hardly ever considered the subject of research with and for CSOs. The dialogue forums set up by ministries or federal agencies can to a certain degree be seen as platforms for input to research agendas when adequate participation of all societal groups is guaranteed. However, new research questions were generated from the results of completed or ongoing research projects. At BMBF (Federal Ministry for Education and Research), one of the largest research funders in Germany, it was not possible to conduct an interview because there was no clarity about where the responsibility for community engaged research lay, and no one therefore felt authorised to discuss it. Nevertheless BMBF was considered as central addressee of participation efforts when setting research agendas: because it is main supporter of publicly funded research and it is the most important (partly exclusive) sponsor of major research communities and organisations. BMBF's support of specific research fields should be in the focus of efforts to participative agenda setting.

There are first indications for including citizens' participation and transdisciplinarity into funding programmes. Even if in the near future only few opportunities for non-institutional civil society organizations will be found to back for their scientific questions and projects, it seems the right time to move community based research out of the margins during the coming years.

Other Sources

Some of the key findings have also been endorsed by other bodies at the European level. President Barroso's Science and Technology Advisory Council recommends in its policy paper 'Science for an informed, sustainable and inclusive knowledge society' that "The Commission should invest in more and more inclusive pan-European citizen participation and involvement programs aimed at advising the Commission (and/or the European parliament) on science- and technology issues. A major topic should be the inclusion of evidence-based and precautionary decision making as important elements of dealing with opportunities and risks of new developments. Furthermore, the Commission should encourage meetings, conferences and symposia directed to bringing experts, civil society and policy-makers together".[7]

The European Commission-funded CONSIDER project (Civil Society Organisations in Designing Research Governance) suggested that CSO participation in research is not an unconditional good, and that in order for CSO involvement to be positive, expected benefits need to be more clearly defined. This can influence the choice and role of CSOs. They suggest that where CSO participation is desired, funding schemes and calls should be adapted and designed in such a way that CSO characteristics can be accommodated. Participation procedures should be simplified and administrative obstacles minimized. While the CONSIDER research has revealed substantial CSO involvement in research, their findings also suggest that most actors in research projects are not aware of options and models of such involvement. Participants have voiced a desire for mechanisms that allow them to share good practice, exchange experience and communicate about different options.[8]

[7] http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/advisory-council/documents/stac_policy_paper_no_1_290813.pdf, last accessed 4.11.2013

[8] http://www.consider-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/CON-PB1-1.5.pdf

Conclusion

The concept of public engagement and its importance to a responsible research and innovation process has evolved rapidly over the past decade. Within the current economic climate and within the context of the major challenges facing society, a deeper engagement by the public in science and technology processes is necessary to ensure that appropriate pathways are followed and that continued high levels of investment in research and innovation are delivering the outcomes that society needs.

In Horizon 2020, the European Commission suggests that for research and innovation to be 'responsible' it should be oriented towards societal needs and should be conducted in a manner that society finds acceptable. In order for this to happen society should be engaged at all stages of the research and innovation process, from the setting of research priorities through to the take-up and exploitation of new technologies. Increasingly it is expected that public engagement will not only improve public confidence, trust and support, but will also lead to more creative inputs, improved decision-making and the development of more appropriate and effective solutions. It is clearly essential for further development and progression of research on science in society that European support mechanisms are in place.

Public consultations revealed that research funding programmes can still involve a greater degree of public input to their design and implementation, with the aim of increasing the public relevance and utility of the supported activities. Successful public engagement is dependent on strong connections between the various stakeholders and on suitable structures and mechanisms for public engagement to be established. There is a clear need to ensure 'full' public engagement throughout the entire research process.[9] The importance of the European Framework Programme support structures for research in this area has to be emphasized. This report finds that whilst there are good practices in developing responsible research amongst research funders, even in countries where there is a strong strategic commitment, much work remains to be done if CSOs are to be truly engaged in research.

[9] technopolis [group] & Fraunhofer ISI (Dec 2012): Interim evaluation & assessment of future options for Science in Society Actions, http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/executive-summary-122012_en.pdf, last accessed 4.11.2013

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Recommendations

Research Funders who wish to consider Public Engagement with Research with and for Civil Society Organisations should:

- Actively seek opportunities to exchange experiences on how to fund and co-fund research with CSO at both a country and European level. The development of an arena for funders to share good practice in this area on national and international level can support the necessary exchange
- Explore a formal model of engagement with CSOs where interests are shared
- Consider reviewing the allocation criteria for calls for proposals and funding programmes to encourage research with and for CSOs in universities. Revised criteria could include an emphasis on transdisciplinary research or making citizen participation a condition of funding
- Consider how to involve CSOs at all stages of the research process, from advising on and designing funding schemes, calls or projects, to evaluation of proposals and research outcomes
- Increase the transparency of decision-making processes in the setting of research agendas in large research communities
- In those cases where CSO participation is warranted, research schemes and calls should be designed in such a way that CSO characteristics can be accommodated. Participation procedures should be simplified and administrative obstacles minimized.

Universities and HEIs who wish to consider Public Engagement of Research with and for Civil Society Organisations should:

- Embed public engagement with research as a concept in research training at all levels
- Consider mechanisms for co-ordination of citizens and university research, such as setting up contact points for civil-society groups to enable an active engagement in research with and for CSOs (e.g. Science Shops)
- Consider international exchanges and mentoring on experiences and models of public engagement within the HEI context. For example this could include sharing practice on funding schemes for public engagement projects, on cooperation and networking, on agenda setting with an by CSOs, or curriculum development as a way to encourage dialogue and broaden the discussion of public engagement

Civil Society Organisations who wish to become involved in Research should:

- Take every opportunity to lobby by attending meetings, talk to scientists, administration, and policy makers or write their specific requests into policy briefs
- Examine ways of developing skills around commissioning and managing research and build up skills and knowledge to impact research agendas
- Seek opportunities to become involved in developing and assessing research funding streams
- Look out for small scale funding schemes which might be given through citizen foundations or crowd funding. Even contacting companies for financial support in the needed research field might be a promising approach.

Co-ordination Actions:

- Further research with CSOs is necessary to understand their views on how and where they impact research agendas.
- There is a need for capacity building and improvement of communication between CSOs and research funders to build a better understanding of where agendas might be shared.
- There is a need to share models of good practices across Europe.

Good Practice Examples

Coordination

In the **United Kingdom**, *The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement* [NCCPE] was established in 2008 as part of the Beacons for Public Engagement initiative. It aims to co-ordinate, capture and share learning between the Beacons and across UK higher education institutions [HEIs] and research institutes[10] and has provided support to many HEIs in terms of embedding public engagement with research. It provides a range of resources on its website including guides to public engagement, case studies and research reports. It also runs an annual conference *Engage.* It recently received funding from RCUK and Wellcome Trust to continue this work until the end of 2013.[11] For details see www.publicengagement.ac.uk

In **Germany** the project *Civil Society Platform – Change in Research* initiates workshops and research activities to take a critical look at current directions of research funding. The platform then formulates alternatives that promote problem-oriented research and that support disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research involving more solution-oriented, integrated approaches. The platform includes environmental organizations, development agencies, health organizations, churches, trade unions and other CSOs. The office of the Civil Society Platform in turn is under the umbrella of the Federation of German Scientists. It was the first nation-wide coordination activity to formulate CSO views and needs on science policy transparency in the research agenda setting process.[12]

Strategy

In **Ireland**, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*[13] was published in January 2011. This offers a blueprint for the way ahead for higher education in the Republic of Ireland. It deals with all aspects of higher education, referring to engagement as one of the three core roles of higher education alongside teaching and research.[14] The definition of engagement is broad 'engagement means taking on civic responsibilities and cooperating with the needs of the community that sustains higher education - including business, the wider education system, and the community and voluntary sector.'[15] It sees engagement as wide ranging and encompassing a full commitment by HEIs to engage at local, national and international level.[16]

Programmes

The **European Commission's** Science in Society (SIS) Programme aims to promote research engagement with society and vice versa. As a follow-up to the Commission staff working paper of November 2000 'Science, Society and the Citizen in Europe'[17], the EC published a Communication on 4 December 2001. This paper sets out the Science and Society Action Plan. This made 'Science and Society' the first ever initiative of its kind on a European scale. It helped increase awareness among research and industry of the need to bring a range of research-related societal issues to the top of the policy agenda. The role of the SIS Programme now is more important than ever before. Its many activities represent the variety of responsibilities that this role encompasses; from better governance practices and more effective communication methods to the pursuit of a more diverse and robust science workforce in Europe.[18] Science with and for Society has a budget of approximately 400 million Euro in Horizon 2020.

The **Netherlands** Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) is the national research council. Their 'Responsible Innovation programme' (MVI) funds and encourages research which considers the ethical and social aspects of new technology right from the design phase.[19] One of the pillars is the *social relevance*: a civil society panel representing the business community and NGOs evaluates the research proposals for their social relevance. Public parties (ministries) and scientists laid the foundation for the programme. NWO provides the programme MVI an annual budget of 1,8 million for funding research available. In addition to the scientific advisory board also a societal panel reviews the grant applications.

Three regions in **France** have established annual calls for projects requiring a partnership between one or more public research structures and one or more civil society organisations. PICRI (Ile de France), ASOSc (Brittany) and Chercheur-Citoyens (Nord-Pas de Calais). They offer financial mechanism for a common research work and equal partnership between non-for-profit civil society organisations and academic researchers (universities, public research organisms) with annual budgets between 700.000 and 1,5 Million Euro.

[10] NCCPE (2012) *About Us.* http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about/ Accessed 24/5/2012
[11] Interview data
[12] http://www.forschungswende.de/index.php
[13] http://www.hea.ie/en/policy/national-strategy
[14] Hunt (2011) Op. Cit. p.5
[15] Ibid., p.74,
[16] Ibid., p. 77
[17] ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/rtd2002/docs/ss_en.pdf
[18] http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1221
[19] http://www.nwo.nl/en/research-and-results/programmes/responsible+innovation

Projects

A major development in the Science in Society funding scheme of **the European Commission** has been the launch of longer-term Mobilisation and Mutual Learning Action Plans (MMLs) since the 2010 Work Programme. The effective involvement and engagement of society in tackling the many challenges being faced requires mechanisms that facilitate cooperation between a diverse range of actors with different types of knowledge. MMLs are designed to bring together actors from research and the wider community (e.g. civil society organisations, ministries, policymakers, science festivals and the media). They collaborate on action plans that connect research activities for a chosen Societal Challenge. These plans encompass a series of SIS actions, such as public engagement, investigating ethics and governance, two-way communication, women in science, and science education. The emphasis is on mobilising all relevant actors and on mutual learning in order to pool experiences and better focus their respective efforts on finding solutions that develop and use scientific and technological knowledge in the public interest.[20]

[20] http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1226

Science Shops across Europe and beyond have developed their experience in setting up and doing small scale research projects developed in collaboration with and for civil society organizations over the past 35 years. They are professional brokers creating win-win situations among CSOs, HEIs, researchers and students. They receive funding from various sources, like universities (e.g. Netherlands), Ministries or Regional Councils (e.g. Belgium, France). By supporting this infrastructure, the co-operation between researchers and CSOs is supported.

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