Bridging the science-policy communication gap

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While policy decisions can have a huge impact on how people interact with their environment - and science should have a key role here - sound decision-making is based on science. This is not however always the case, and a team of European researchers puts this down to communication gaps between science, policy and society. And they are

doing something about it.

Partners within the PLACES ('Platform of local authorities and cities engaged in [science](#)') project are developing a platform for a range of actors to use as they communicate and work together at both city and regional levels.

At the top of the researchers' agenda is the promotion and implementation of the City of Scientific Culture across 90 regions through the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN). The network helps to facilitate knowledge-sharing, fosters collaboration and stimulates joint action between member regions. Local policy-makers and authorities are working together with science centres, museums and festivals to make the cities of scientific culture a reality.

Since its launch in 2010, PLACES has held annual conferences, workshops in the 'science cities', and organised thematic working groups and training for [civil servants](#).

The workshops showed how local [science communication](#) policies should be developed, while the working groups stimulated conversation about science communication policies and activities, and how these are linked to the Europe 2020 targets on climate change and energy, education, poverty, employment, and research and development. The consortium has also encouraged workshop participants to recommend pilot activities.

PLACES is now in its third year and drafting practical guidelines on implementing science communication policies.

In mid-June, the researchers completed the pilot activity 'aMUSEment PARK', which encouraged young Europeans to design scenarios showing how to use public green areas in the Italian alpine city of Trento,

including the Le Albere Park in front of MUSE - Trento's new science museum.

MUSE experts contributed scientific knowledge on re-moulding the spaces, and a local stakeholder provided a web platform. The designer behind the winning proposals received vouchers for technology products.

The partners also devised the PLACES Stakeholders Assembly, allowing researchers from public, private or academic bodies to share information with non-governmental organisations and media.

The team developed the PLACES OPEN web platform, a workspace that hosts all information developed, created and exchanged by and between the project participants. But it is also more than that - individuals or groups that wish to contribute to PLACES can upload their work.

The researchers say the reports, evaluations and surveys generated over the duration of the project will provide key insight into how local actors and science interact, and bring policy recommendations to the table.

The data collected on science communication policies and actors, and impact assessments on activities will be used to draft recommendations on developing communication policies that would benefit Europeans in various cities and across regions.

The project is funded under the 'Science in Society' (SIS) theme of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) to the tune of EUR 5.2 million. Due to end in May 2014, PLACES brings together researchers and policy experts from Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Hungary and Austria.

  More information: PLACES www.openplaces.eu/

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