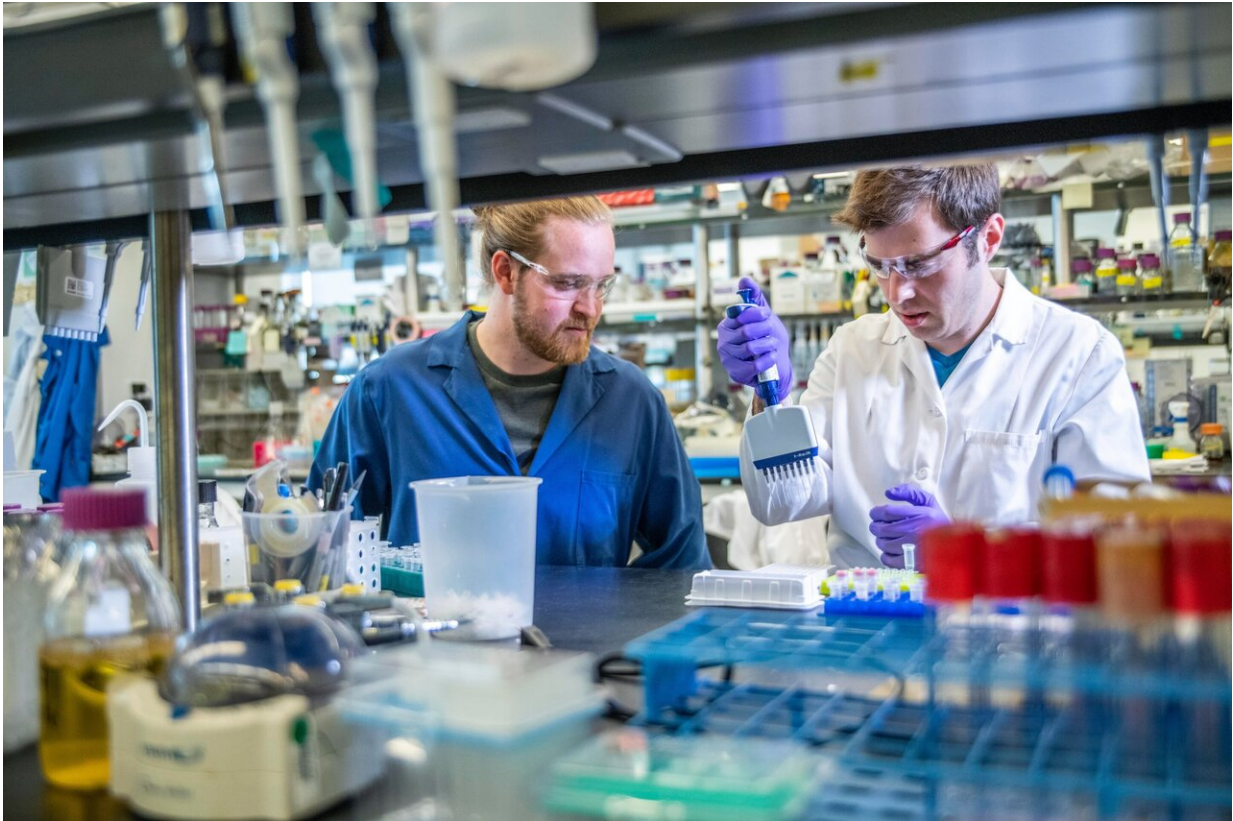


Analysis of the relations between Spanish civil society organizations and science

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Researchers at UPF have analyzed the relationship between civil society organizations and the Spanish science and technology system. The study has been published in *Public Understanding of Science* and conducted by

Carolina Llorente and Gema Revuelta, at the Science, Communication and Society Studies Center (CCS-UPF), and Mar Carrió, of the Health Sciences Educational Research Group (GRECS).

In recent decades, movements have emerged promoting the inclusion of [society](#) in the [research process](#) in order to build more socially relevant science. This new model of scientific production is becoming established in Europe and increasingly worldwide. "Often, social participation does not take place individually, but through civil society organizations, so our study, for the first time in Spain, explores the interactions between these organizations and science," Carolina Llorente explains. "Understanding the perspectives of these organizations is useful for proposing effective tools to help strengthen relations between science and society," she adds. The concept of organized civil society includes nonprofit organizations in which citizens are generally involved on a voluntary basis: patient and consumer associations, organizations working for the environment or animal rights, humanitarian associations, groups of minorities, etc.

The analysis was based on semi-structured interviews with managers of 31 Spanish organizations. Organizations were selected taking into account their characteristics and distribution across the country. In Spain, there are three so-called unique organizations, La ONCE, the Red Cross and Cáritas, which account for over 60% of the country's volunteers. There are also groups of organizations (federations), but what really makes up the bulk of volunteers are small, decentralized associations that are highly active at local level, but generally have few financial resources.

The study results show that a large number of organizations are not involved in science and technology, or in some cases, are not aware of their involvement. The most common type of collaboration is to act as research study subjects, for example, in cases where social associations whose members are interviewed. Such is the case, for example, of

investigations that examine the role of certain minorities (i.e., religious or linguistic) that contact organizations dealing with such matters to interview their members. To a lesser extent, organizations, usually patient organizations, fund research through calls to tender, prizes and awards, or they carry out research within the organization. In some cases, organizations also participate as advisors or in training targeting the researchers to transfer their sectoral knowledge to the academic environment.

Regarding hindrances for participation, interviewees agree that the main one is the lack of financial resources and personnel. But they also mention the lack of mutual knowledge: Scientists do not know what the organizations are doing and the latter are not aware of what they can contribute or do not know how they can engage in scientific production.

In the words of Mar Carrió: "As a strategy to improve ties, we believe there is a need to encourage researchers to know how to integrate into the organizations and vice versa, for these groups to gain greater knowledge of how science works."

As for the ideal relationship that the associations wish to have with the system of science and technology, generally speaking, civil society organizations appear to be unaware of their own potential and what they can contribute to research. Nevertheless, the results indicate that these associations are willing to engage in scientific production, for example, proposing that they should be consulted from the outset to help approach research.

"In order to promote relations between science and society, there is a need to strengthen alliances between these two worlds. This could be done through better communication between academia and [civil society](#) organizations and, therefore, researchers require solid training in this field," Gema Revuelta affirms. "But we also have to open channels that

allow formal, stable relations between institutions and align the research goals with the expectations of society," she concludes.

More information: Carolina Llorente et al, Social participation in science: Perspectives of Spanish civil society organizations, *Public Understanding of Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0963662520960663](https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662520960663)

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