

Communication: A key tool for citizen participation in science

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Researchers from Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona, Spain) have analyzed the way citizen science is practiced in Spain. The paper, produced by Carolina Llorente and Gema Revuelta, from UPF's Science,

Communication and Society Studies Centre (CCS-UPF) and Mar Carrió, from the University's Health Sciences Educational Research Group (GRECS), has been published in the *Journal of Science Communication* (JCOM).

Based on the study, a series of recommendations have been put forward to improve how [citizen](#) participation in science is carried out. Firstly, they suggest efforts be stepped up regarding the training given for assessing these initiatives or the creation of multi-disciplinary teams with a broad range of knowledge areas to organize this kind of assessment. They also highlight the importance of keeping in mind the activities' reproducibility.

The aims of the study were to identify citizen science participants in Spain, define what role communication plays and analyze to what extent the key requirements for undertaking citizen science are integrated in its practice. This is the first time this aspect has been studied in Spain.

In this qualitative study, researchers analyzed 16 interviews with coordinators of science activities in which citizens participate, which included the active participation of individuals in different phases of a research project. This participation could consist in providing opinions, collaborating with [data collection](#), interpreting results and/or evidence-based decision-making.

The results indicate a largely strategic participation of groups of people with traits that make them ideal for participating in certain projects (such as neighbors, patients, public administration staff, etc.). The authors also highlight captive audiences—those who participate in activities without having volunteered for them and who have no choice but to take part, such as school students, for example.

The researchers underline communication as a key tool for successful

practice. Gema Revuelta explains that "efforts must be spent in the conceptualization phase to identify the participants, the best strategies for ensuring their participation and the expected level of commitment for the project."

The selection of a strategic public is essential for an activity of this nature to work properly. Although most interviewees made reference to this, there are some who continue to view the public as a single entity. Carolina Llorente stresses that "it makes no sense to identify the public as 'general public' in this kind of activity. Efforts need to be made when designing the activity to identify which specific groups should participate."

They also analyzed the level of integration of five essential key elements that form part of a citizen science activity: The findings, the level of participant contribution, participation assessment, the reproducibility of the activity and the training of the participants and facilitators. Of particular importance here is training in specific skills based on the level of citizen participation and the need to train the teams responsible for organizing the activities.

Researcher Carolina Llorente explains that the resulting insight into how citizen [science](#) is being performed "gives us a starting point for proposing improvement strategies to incentivize this way of doing research."

More information: Carolina Llorente et al, Characteristics of Spanish citizen participation practices in science, *Journal of Science Communication* (2021). [DOI: 10.22323/2.20040205](https://doi.org/10.22323/2.20040205)

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