

Facilitating and assessing the participation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in research

**East-Meets-West on Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Congress and Exhibition Session 1.21**

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Cyprus

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The session is organized by the CONSIDER project and is open to CSOs, researchers, policy makers and industry representatives.



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www.consider-project.eu

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Background

Broader stakeholder engagement in technical and scientific research is desirable for a variety of reasons. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) can be optimal actors to realise the promise of participative research governance. Despite much activity to stimulate and implement CSO participation in research, there is no agreement on how to evaluate the success of participation.

The session aims to discuss insights into questions around stakeholder engagement in research and more particularly the participation of CSOs in research design and governance. This event is the first of five Presidential events that form part of the CONSIDER project, a research programme funded through the EU's 7th Framework Programme. CONSIDER will undertake conceptually sound and empirically rich research to establish a model of CSO participation in research. CONSIDER stands for Civil Society Organisations in Designing Research Governance. It is an EU FP7 research project running from 02/2012 until 01/2015.

Session Description

The discussions during this event will focus on the role of Civil Society Organisations in the research process. At the end of the workshop participants will have gained new insights on the involvement and motivations of Civil Society Organisations in research governance, as well as have the opportunity to feed into strategic guidelines for future participation.

You are invited to take part in and to invite others to participate in this workshop. It will be an active, learning encounter and offers interesting ideas with practical outcomes that can help in the future response to funding calls in Horizon 2020 and beyond.

Discussion will focus on crucial issues such as:

- To what extent can theories of participation and stakeholder engagement be applied to scientific projects?
- Which types of CSO participation are observable?
- What are CSOs' objectives while doing research?
- What are the important terms of reference for defining CSOs and participative research?
- How are CSOs involved in research and governance?
- What are the problems associated with CSO participation in research and how may these be overcome?
- What are the current landscape and future possible trajectories of CSOs in research design?

The session will consist of a brief project overview followed by a panel discussion which will investigate the typology, the current problems and the models that could facilitate the participation and assessment of CSOs' input to research. The session will include an open discussion with CSOs' representatives, academics and researchers from various fields

The CONSIDER Project

The CONSIDER project will contrast theoretical views on benefits and limitations with empirical findings on the practice of CSO participation. Based on a grid of analysis, the project will survey all FP7 research projects. It will investigate 30 relevant projects as in-depth case studies. Using the conceptual grid of analysis and empirical data, a model of CSO participation in research will be developed. This model, representing relationships and causal effects of factors influencing CSO participation, will allow for comparative analysis to determine the role they play in achieving participation objectives. No such model currently exists, which renders it difficult to plan, implement and evaluate CSO participation in research.

Who will benefit from CONSIDER?

- *Research community* – Researchers will be better able to plan and execute CSO participation.
- *Policy / decision makers* – Improved provision of scientific evidence to underpin research governance policies.
- *Civil Society Organisations* – Increased mutual awareness of and value for the involvement of CSOs in research.
- *Research funders* – Informed development and implementation of future funding programmes e.g. Horizon 2020.

Expected outcomes

- A survey of existing CSO involvement across all FP7 research projects (12000+).
- In-depth case study analysis of up to 30 projects.
- A model of CSO participation in research that will allow for comparative analysis of crucial success factors.
- Guidelines and policy recommendations for successful research strategies relating to the involvement of CSOs.

CONSIDER will itself employ CSO participation. The project is developing a network of 100+ CSO actors to contribute to a richer debate as associate partners in the project. This approach will ensure that the project meets the expected impacts of the call and will have practical relevance to stakeholders. If you would like to be part of this network, you can stay informed of current developments by joining the CONSIDER Network of Associates via the project website.

As noted above, the findings from this research programme will lead to specific guidelines and policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders. CONSIDER will provide a necessary contribution for the further development of the European Research Area.

There are five main stages to the CONSIDER research programme, each of which are briefly outlined on the following pages:

1. Civil Society Organisation participation in research governance
2. The practice of CSO participation
3. Model of CSO participation
4. Guidelines for CSO participation in research
5. Dissemination and awareness raising



1. Civil Society Organisation participation in research governance

CONSIDER will address at least three central issues:

- 1) Explore the knowledge and research potential of CSOs
- 2) Investigate how CSOs are involved in research processes
- 3) Use this knowledge to inform policy makers on how to integrate CSOs in further research activities.

This strand of research will initially ask on what grounds CSOs can be involved in research activities. This work will begin by conceptualising CSO involvement in the overall theory of research governance. As a result, a theoretical answer will be given to the question of why CSOs are involved in research processes. With reference to current literature, the main models of participatory involvement will be identified. The findings will indicate what best practice of CSO participation in research can achieve.

A core question going beyond the mere description of CSOs in research governance is *how CSO engagement in research can be evaluated*. The way CONSIDER addresses this question will be based on the grid of analysis, developed throughout this research phase, and will incorporate both theoretical analysis and the patterns which emerge from the empirical investigation of current research projects.

This research will initially explore how best to account, on normative grounds, for the role of civil society in new modes of research governance. This will involve a kind of tour of the theoretical landscape. The point is to focus specifically on the role of civil society and will take into account the tensions and complementarities between participatory approaches and deliberative approaches and consider the institutionalisation of CSO participation:

- Give an historical review of the dynamics that have made very salient both the role of civil society and legitimacy concerns in research and research governance.
- Review theoretical grounding of civil society participation and determine the criteria to analyse participatory experiences.
- Determine the relationship between conceptual approaches and empirical field of study.
- Deduce from the theoretical landscape key parameters to inform field analysis.
- Create the groundwork for a *grid of analysis*.

The grid of analysis plays a central role in the project. An analytical grid is a means to uncover the preconceptions underlying claims, judgements, views, or in this case the implementation of CSO participation in research. Essentially, in applying the analytical grid we are shining a light on the (perhaps unstated) assumptions that underwrite any given position. Using an analytical grid is like being a reverse engineer, or acquiring an object and deriving its design on the basis of its appearance rather than designing from scratch an object with a purpose.

This strand of research is central to implementing these steps and delimiting the research in general in order to create coherent research as well as a strong foundation on which to base means of assessment for participatory practice, and for policy advice. This research strand also contributes centrally to the grounding the overall vision, or trajectory of study, for the project as a whole.

2. The practice of CSO participation

The objective of the second research strand is to conduct an empirical study of current CSO involvement in research. Building on the theoretical basis for CSO engagement defined in the previous section, this research will identify and analyze European examples of CSO participation. This empirical investigation will also contribute to the identification of patterns and critical variables of CSO participation.

CONSIDER will explore the existing diversity of CSO involvement mechanisms, analyzing their features and normative frames. A crucial part of the process will be to assess what participation levels are experienced in R&D contexts, including the impact of citizens' participation on research governance, methodologies, and decision-making processes, as well as on the societal groups themselves.

Within this strand we recognize the importance of exploring participation at a variety of scales (local, regional, national, European). Our study will first focus on FP7 research programs, after which we will encompass other databases at a national level. A case study approach will enable us to explore these issues in more depth, as well as investigate any differences at local or regional levels. We are also interested in a range of different participation and inclusion levels. For example, we would like to learn whether findings from existing research projects are utilized by CSOs, and if so, in what ways? What kind of CSOs are involved? How strong is their involvement in research?

Main steps

1. Quantitative survey

The bottom-up analysis includes large scale data collection from existing FP7 research projects, along with local, national and international experiments in order to analyze CSO activities in research, where they are taking place, in what manner, and within what limits. Every FP7 Project Coordinator is invited to complete a very short questionnaire to identify which projects have involved CSOs. A more detailed follow-up questionnaire is then sent to those Project Coordinators who are willing to participate in our survey and whose projects include CSOs, to identify patterns of participation.

2. Qualitative survey of CSOs' participation in various contexts

The analytic grid from the first research strand will be applied to 30 case studies across Europe. For each case study semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the CSO members and the research team. Where possible, we would also like to observe research project meetings directly. Further data will be gathered via textual analysis of any reports or other supporting documents resulting from the project. The scope of the case study work is large and will include investigations of CSOs' capacities, key actors, intended purposes, motivations for involvement and ways of cooperation. Various modes of participation will be analyzed, for instance from research governance to participatory action research or science shops.

3. Model of CSO participation

The main objective of the third research strand is to develop a model of CSO participation in research. In doing so, it builds on the theoretical approaches to participation in research (strand 1) and empirical research on instances of CSO participation in research projects (strand 2). This stage of the research will apply the analytical grid developed in the first research phase to the empirical findings from the second phase, to identify gaps of current governance theories. The results of this stage of the research are an important input for the formulation of the guidelines (strand 4).

At an early stage of this strand, CONSIDER therefore has the difficult task of synthesising the empirical and analytical considerations of earlier strands of research. Creating a model of CSO involvement necessarily requires input from both theoretical and empirical perspectives; both sides influence each other reflectively here. From the empirical observations and findings, shortcomings of present governance theories can be demonstrated. On the other hand the theoretical frame provides methods for the search of implicit norms in participatory practice. It also delivers categories to classify these practices. This reciprocal approach will in the end illustrate appropriate limitations and possibilities for both the empirical and analytical perspectives.

Identifying the expected gaps in current governance theories is also a part of this strand of research, as the application of categories and parameters on the empirical findings. The assessment of empirical data has to show where further data is required for the construction of a complete model. The model should represent the various dimensions and different forms of participatory practices in its broad scope. Consultation and close communication with the Associates should ensure the acceptability of the normative conception and the critique of on-going participatory governance. The CONSIDER discussion forum will be used to discuss potentially controversial issues related to this work. Selected CSOs will also be invited to review draft versions of project reports as part of an extended peer review process.

4. Guidelines for CSO participation in research

The CONSIDER project will develop guidelines that will be meaningful and applicable to a cross section of stakeholders in ensuring CSO participation in research. To this end we will ensure that the research findings formulated and synthesised in the sections above are translated into manageable and applicable recommendations, guidelines that allow stakeholders to improve their processes of engaging CSO in research, and simple to use ICT tools to guide users through recommendations and findings.

CONSIDER research needs to be conducted in a way that will render it amenable to practical policy recommendations. It is therefore important that this requirement of practical relevance is injected across the CONSIDER project early in the research phase. This will be achieved by involving a large number of Associates, a number of whom will be policy stakeholders in the project from the outset.

Such involvement already occurred with the first CSO workshop that took place on the 20th of June 2012 in Porto, Portugal following an earlier attempt to involve other stakeholders took place at the Living Knowledge Conference in Bonn. Furthermore, the guidelines will be formulated using CSO input through workshops, EU Presidency events and other stakeholder engagement.

5. Dissemination and awareness raising

Key to the success of the CONSIDER project is the dissemination of key research findings to relevant external groups. These audiences include:

- Associates network of 100+ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)
- Research organisations (to include academic audiences)
- Policy organisations (especially at European level)
- Nationally-based knowledge transfer and innovation networks in key member states and member regions of the European Regional Network
- Press, especially at regional and national levels

A wide variety of online, print and face-to-face media are contributing to the dissemination of the CONSIDER project findings. These include a dedicated website (www.consider-project.eu) which also incorporates a news section and social media networks for sharing up-to-date information, and a virtual electronic forum for the Associate network. Various leaflets and information summaries are being produced for different audiences, for example project flyers, magazines, press releases and other media distributions. Two Policy Briefs (released approximately 18 and 36 months into the project) will provide problem-oriented and policy-relevant summaries that are suitable for informing policy development at both national and European levels. Throughout the project there will also be various workshops (e.g. relating to the guidelines that will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders) and dissemination events that will be used to highlight the CONSIDER findings to strategically important groups, including a final conference at month 33. Finally, CONSIDER will contribute to various EU Presidency Events held during its duration, ensuring close links between the research and potential policy implications throughout the programme.

Project Partners



De Montfort University (UK)



Signosis Sprl (BE)



Facultes Universitaires Notre-Dame De La Paix De Namur (BE)



Université De Lille II - Droit Et Sante (FR)



Karlsruher Institut fuer Technologie (DE)



Euclid Network (UK)



University College London (UK)



Science-Policy Interface Agency (DE)

For further information about the CONSIDER project, or to sign up to the Network of Associates to be kept informed of the research findings as they are produced, please visit the project website: www.consider-project.eu. For your convenience a QR-code taking you directly to the site is provided to the right here (this will work with appropriately enabled smartphones and tablets).

