

Boosting society's participation in science

Background description

Opinion surveys, such as the Europe-wide Eurobarometer studies, reveal that people feel poorly informed about science and technology issues. Yet the same surveys show that many people want to know more about R&D, and that society at large takes a keen interest in controversial issues such as genetically modified organisms and stem cell research. Europe's citizens could begin to feel more included if they could actively participate in shaping science and technology policies. The European Commission is committed to supporting networks and projects that bring together the scientific community and society, and that give people a chance to debate the future direction of research.

Project profile

CIPAST – Citizen Participation in Science and Technology – is a project that aims to boost society's involvement in science policy. The objective is to build a large platform of European decision-makers and organisations which are already working to increase public involvement in research, such as institutes, science shops, museums, academics and existing participatory networks.

With the help of these partner organisations, CIPAST will set up training programmes for political decision-makers and those who work in the research sector for NGOs and industry. The aim of the training is to help participants find new and interesting ways for society to actively take part in science policy.

The training programmes will be designed using information and experiences gathered from about 40 international organisations. CIPAST will make a special effort to identify and include participants from the EU's new Member States.

Full project title: Citizen Participation in Science and Technology

Project acronym: CIPAST

EU funding: €750 000

Project launch: 1 April 2005

Duration: 36 months

Project coordinator: Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie – France

Website: <http://www.cite-sciences.fr>

<http://www.wilabonn.de/cipast/cipast.php>

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Science in society significance

The European Union is committed to bringing science policy closer to the citizen. Its Science and Society programme is already supporting a number of activities and networks that have been designed to boost society's participation in European and national research.

The CIPAST platform will bring together many of the organisations that are committed to improving citizens' involvement in science and technology. CIPAST's training programmes will provide policy-makers and science professionals with new methods and techniques to improve participatory initiatives. In general, the platform will also spread good practice and encourage new ideas to promote public participation in research.

In the long term, CIPAST should ensure that the dialogue between researchers and citizens is backed by concrete actions that will strengthen the science and society interface.

Expected results/outcomes

- ▲ CIPAST will encourage the transfer of knowledge and experience between organisations that are committed to improving public involvement in science.
- ▲ The platform will produce a set of training programmes for science policy professionals.
- ▲ Dissemination activities will be carried out through a website, a regular newsletter, and several workshops.