



Outlooks of Citizens-Based Future-Oriented Agenda Setting

This policy brief is developed as part of the CIMULACT project. From its onset, CIMULACT aimed to provide a unique contribution to the inputs shaping the final work programme for H2020 (FP8) and the development of the Ninth Framework Programme (FP9) to follow H2020. In order to achieve this, CIMULACT was structured as a multi-phase, inclusive future visioning and agenda-setting process – using thousands of citizen-generated visions of the future to contribute to the development of a workable Research and Innovation agenda for the EU and to exemplify the potency of open science approaches. More than 5000 participants were engaged in the course of the project and actively participated in shaping R&I topics.

Introduction

The CIMULACT project collected, explored, and aggregated citizen-based visions of desirable and sustainable futures for the EU as a means to derive a research and innovation agenda for the EU by which governing structures can better align research and innovation (R&I) policy and funding to the aspirations of their citizens.

A common concern for the consideration of citizen-generated input into any mainstream policy process, however, is that it might turn out to be incompatible, or even contradictory, to what well-established and highly scientific foresight reports prepared by professional institutions might suggest; or that it is scientifically deficient and thus cannot be trusted. The experience in CIMULACT, as well as the analyses carried out by the project's teams render this concern unfounded.

CIMULACT elaborated research topics that are both **intelligently rendered visions of desirable futures**, and the coherent foundation for a comprehensive R&I agenda. As such, CIMULACT proved to provide a solid participatory, future-oriented methodology, and demonstrated how knowledge- and evidence-based participatory governance could work.

CIMULACT further provides a unique perspective into the types of R&I programmes that could better address citizens' concerns and desires across the EU member states. It follows then, that CIMULACT's success, alongside other participatory governance programmes, could pave the way for a **broadened utilisation of methods that include diverse voices from multiple stakeholder groups**.

An important conclusion of this process was that participatory, future-oriented methods can contribute in an original and significant way to the elaboration of priorities in science and innovation – either independently, or by complementing scientifically

grounded (expert-led) foresight approaches, thus also illustrating the strong potential of the application of open science-based approaches to R&I policy-making.

The Added Value of Participatory Methods

CIMULACT uncovered substantial differences between citizens and experts that have direct policy implications, and could be considered in the process of policy design, particularly in:

- 1) the framing of research problems;
- 2) the methods promoted to address these challenges, and
- 3) the prioritisation of research areas for the upcoming Framework Programme 9.

The R&I agenda proposed by the CIMULACT project contrasts significantly with expert-based foresight reports, particularly in the **promotion of inclusive social experimentation to find scalable solutions to the perceived challenges**. Furthermore, it would appear that well-being, work-life balance, and related aspects of the citizens' desires expressed in their visions are systematically ignored by the expert-based foresight process. Whereas expert-based reports tend to focus on the possibilities that new technologies could enable, and general statements concerning trends and their potential impacts, **CIMULACT proposals focus on presenting deliberate R&I research agendas across a variety of social, economic, and political challenge areas**. It is our conclusion that the methodology employed by CIMULACT facilitated new approaches to social innovation, and resulted in a **novel R&I agenda that clearly speaks to the fundamental, future-oriented desires of diverse citizenry**.

CIMULACT results present distributed forms of governance as critical spaces for experimentation across all major societal sectors. Experts' omission of such governance models accounts for a significant part of the



misalignment between citizens' and experts' recommendations.

Citizen visions for a desirable and sustainable future forms the baseline for proposed research topics, resulting in a society-centric frame for future research and innovation. Meanwhile, the recommendations of expert-based reports seem to hide their impact on humans behind a mask of ambiguity.

It is useful when writing R&I policy to **consider the differences that set technology and society apart**, and how those differences translate into values that can inform governance. A marked tendency among expert foresight reports to view technological development as valuable from a more strictly economic point of view, would render social values emphasized by CIMULACT as mere background texture. However, for governing institutes truly dedicated to a tighter integration of citizen input with policy craft, social values of community-building, respectful human interaction, technological co-development, egalitarian economic models, physical and mental well-being, and others, must be viewed as peer concerns within new policy decisions. CIMULACT results, as representative of a wider range of participatory governing methods, are singularly effective at highlighting the importance of integrated socio-technological R&I agenda setting.

Why consider the results of participatory action-oriented designs?

An important belief that the CIMULACT consortium shared with the European Commission was that **citizens are capable of suggesting directions for research**. Methods such as CIMULACT help uncover the fundamental differences in perspectives and approaches to identifying problem areas and proposing outlines for work towards solutions, which are an integrative part of the democratic policy-making process. Moreover, CIMULACT results confirmed that research agendas of the EU reflect essential citizens' interests and needs. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that **participatory methods provide usable insights into at least the following ways:**

Human vs Techno-centricity

As is to be expected, there is a discrepancy between expert-authored reports and citizen-generated input. Importantly and interestingly, a difference that truly matters is the inability of expert studies to adequately capture and address human centric concerns. Instead,

they remain focused on technological developments and their implications, establishing a techno-centric perspective as a dominant discourse in policy. In contrast, in CIMULACT elaborated research agendas repeatedly espoused research vectors that examine consumer behaviour, localised policy framework experimentation, and learning systems - all hallmarks of a human-centred approach towards research and innovation.

Local innovation and development

The CIMULACT approach served to highlight an important **difference in framing how, by whom, and for whom research is to be conducted**. By aligning local and regional knowledge and practice with researchers, CIMULACT aims to uncover solutions by working within a cultural context - solutions that can be deployed and scaled up when, where, and for whom they are deemed appropriate. That is especially notable with regard to the inherent diversity of the EU citizenry, particularly as local populations report feeling removed from, and sometimes alienated by, larger EU governing structures.

Designed Education and Implied Adaptation

CIMULACT demonstrated the popular expectation that educational programmes should address current challenges by way of **enabling informed, inclusive, and creative problem solving**. Such proactive stance enables future inclusivity, while acknowledging and empowering the 'social' component of socio-technological change. It is also in stark contrast to the dominant and largely technocratic momentum that somehow, societies and their citizens would "adapt" to technological change, but failing to recognise the challenges and social costs thereof.

Aligning to Challenges, Diverging on Solutions

Another stark contrast is to be found not so much in the elaboration of issues and thematic priorities, but rather in the proposed solutions. This is notably the case in workplace and employment issues, various forms of unpaid work and volunteering models, social welfare and tax policies, and work-life balance. The participatory process of CIMULACT resulted in identifying research paths that could lead to better work efficiency, workplace cooperation and collective production, on the one hand, and to profitable ways to achieve inter-related citizen desires, on the other.



Different Scales

Experts' analyses typically rely on a perspective in which systems, organisations, or 'the city' become the smallest unit of analysis in regards to trends, emergent technologies, or other issues. While conceiving of such entities is useful within some contexts, such a practice also homogenises both these entities, and their constituents. This in turn promotes the illusion that singular solutions can be found, and should be the focus of research, but also of policy.

CIMULACT proved the above assertion is not always the only possibility. Rather, it is also the individuals, their support networks and communities that become the unit of interest. While such an approach may at first appear inefficient, by targeting smaller scale actions for initial research, a productive menagerie of solutions might still emerge - one that is, perhaps, more representative of the heterogeneities that define the EU experience.

Choosing Targets for and Defining the Scope of Solutions

Experts and citizens tend to frame their views of both problems and solutions in a different way, and in both cases this can credibly inform the policy-making process. Notably, experts tend to set different targets (for solutions), and argue for specific paths for pursuing them, often grounding these paths into their own disciplinary domain (i.e. an economic problem typically requires an economic solution). Thus, it is very often that expert-based reports offer sporadic, and often divergent, proposals for future research and innovation.

Framing of problems by citizens is often done in a cross-cutting way, regardless of the main issue at stake. That results into mixing the same widely perceived theme down into more specific, but disciplinary divergent issues – i.e. the theme of community and personal well-being is often found across topics such as personal development, lifestyle choice, education and training, healthcare and nutrition, to name a few. Thus, it appears that citizens are still more comfortable with a more expansive focus, which opens up an opportunity for a richer set of complementary policy solutions.

Outlooks

The CIMULACT project proved to be a good example of an RRI process that can be used for engaging citizens in setting the research agenda at the national level (e.g.

universities working with the principle of RRI or collaboration with ministries) or for municipalities to be more citizens-oriented. Furthermore, the project demonstrated the importance of public engagement in giving an opportunity to citizens to shape future policy and express individual and societal needs and provided a very solid praxis-based example of how to embody open science principles in R&I policy making.

The working hypothesis of the CIMULACT project was that **citizen-derived visions of the future must be accounted for in EU-Level policy formulation and decision-making particularly in regards to the last tranche of calls and topics of Horizon2020 (2018-2020) as well as the next Framework Programme.**

CIMULACT results present distributed forms of governance as critical spaces for experimentation across all major societal sectors. Despite convergences between expert-produced foresight analyses, CIMULACT's citizen-driven visioning processes have demonstrated how R&I policy-making could be additionally informed through reaffirming the importance/priority of already established, but still fuzzy, priorities; **by demonstrating a stronger connection between values and policy expectations; by uncovering new thematic priorities, or adjusting the policy consensus on those priorities.**

Therefore, participatory and future-oriented agenda-setting processes, such as that embodied in CIMULACT, can significantly enhance policy visioning, especially on issues that are predominantly based off technocratic solutionism. It further presents research areas and goals couched within scenarios that reflect the plurality and diversity that compose the EU's citizenry.

*Further information to this policy brief can be found in the reports **D5.2 "Report on comparison of research topics from CIMULACT with those from expert oriented foresight studies"** and **D5.3 "Report on the impact of the project"** at <http://www.cimulact.eu/publications>.*



In short about CIMULACT

CIMULACT stands for ‘Citizen and Multi-Actor Consultation on Horizon 2020’ (the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation). It engages citizens across Europe, along with a variety of other actors, in shaping a desirable sustainable future. In a highly participatory process, the project provides a unique contribution to European research and innovation policies and topics, creates dialogue and shared understanding among the actors, and builds strong capacities in citizen engagement,

thereby enhancing responsible research and innovation in the EU.

CIMULACT, which started in June 2015, is a three-year project funded by the European Commission. For more information on the project, please, visit the website at: www.cimulact.eu.

Project partners

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