



Mission Orientation:  
**Science *for* not *with* society?**  
POLICY BRIEF 4



**Mission Orientation:**

# **Science *for* *not* *with* society?**

**EU policy needs to strengthen the focus on processes to foster collaborative, multi-actor, cross sectoral research and innovation**

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## Recommendations for policy actors:

- (a) Provide specific funding to and require appropriate governance structures for creating multi-actor coalitions and engaging civil society actors throughout the research and innovation process;
- (b) Mission agendas, goals and strategies should be defined with diverse actors and societal stakeholders who are willing to participate in the R&I process;
- (c) Missions should include civic aspirations, values and goals and avoid focusing predominantly on technology innovation or deployment;
- (d) Missions and other R&I constellations should involve all helices throughout the R&I process from mission definition to output, and safeguards must be provided that decisions are made on a democratic and equal footing regardless of Mission agenda ownership or funding contribution;
- (e) A balanced view of input and output orientation must be followed to incorporate different types of knowledges and traditions, value orientations and goal aspirations of all helices from the QH model.

## Introduction: Mission orientation and Quadruple Helix Innovation

Missions are an integral part of the new EU Framework Programme, Horizon Europe (HE), with the declared aim to stimulate innovation, to solve major societal problems while actively including a number of stakeholders and citizens<sup>2 3</sup>. Alignment of R&I with needs of citizens and the involvement of actors from civil society is theorized and advocated by the concept of Quadruple Helix Innovation.

*Based on the findings of the RiConfigure project on democratic knowledge production we advise caution and reflexivity when applying mission-orientation. By shifting the attention to the goals and outputs of R&I the level playing field for citizen engagement throughout the process may be jeopardized.*

While HE Missions indeed address matters that are highly relevant for society, like fighting cancer or climate change, and while these promote transdisciplinarity and the engagement of citizens, decisions on how to address the issues at stake seem to have mostly been made. Thus, there might be little room for other stakeholders and citizens to actually impact the process and its results or define the mission. Academic discourse calls this output-legitimization,<sup>4</sup> a concept we

2 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe/missions-horizon-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe/missions-horizon-europe_en)

3 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/contact/documents/ec\\_rtd\\_mazzuato-report-issue2\\_072019.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/contact/documents/ec_rtd_mazzuato-report-issue2_072019.pdf)

4 Cf.: Schmidt VA. Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and 'Throughput.' *Political Studies*. 2013;61(1):2-22. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00962.x

will discuss below. Our research shows that in order to meaningfully engage stakeholders and citizens, engagement must start early and allow for responsiveness and openness for adaption including the mission and strategies to get there.

## Riconfigure

The Quadruple Helix concept aims for the involvement of actors from diverse sectors in R&I, emphasizing an active role of civil society, thus promoting a democratic model of knowledge production. Major idea is that collaborative actions incorporate better the views of different stakeholders and thus, ultimately, produce more solid outputs. In course of the RiConfigure project, we have analysed a number of R&I cases that align with the Quadruple Helix concept as four different types of actors were involved in innovation collaborations. We applied the method of social labs to investigate cases such as: (1) An open innovation platform and a community of practice created by the publicly owned Austrian railways; (2) A local civil association-initiated research hub of multiple actors in Roskilde, Denmark; (3) An industry focused sustainable water and energy project experiment inviting different actors in the Netherlands; (4) A research institute lead project that aims at changing traditional hierarchies in Germany; (5) Ideas laboratory to develop new concepts for sustainability, a governmental program initiated by public servant 'entrepreneurs' working for Colciencias – the Colombian Research Council. All of these projects struggle with challenges of governance and, mainly, how these new sets of actors may work together and whether civil society (or the public at large through some form of organizational structure) can become a meaningful cooperative actor in innovation endeavours.

## Research findings from the Social Labs

We only found a few cases that actually involve actors from all four Helixes, namely academia, industry, public sector and civil society, throughout the process. Most often, the fourth helix, i.e., civil society, is the last to enter a collaboration, if at all, and the one with least power and impact. We also see that those actors who establish collaborations are the ones to decide on major directions, governance and outcomes. Missions of the innovation collaborations are predefined by the actors initiating the constellation – typically from public sector, research or industry. We observed that the active involvement of actors from all helices across the innovation process requires solid financial and governance structures, especially for actors with limited resources, like NGOs. Those cases, close to the idea of the Quadruple Helix model, were mainly publicly funded, either through national or EU funds, which provided the necessary structure to foster engagement of actors from all four sectors. Moreover, solid funding and governance structures reduce the interferences of actors beyond the collaborations. Such outside actors, like governance boards, policy actors, other business units within the company or new dedicated funding have a strong, oftentimes detrimental impact on Quadruple Helix collaboration and how diversity, goals and aims of social groups gets represented. Our findings point towards involvement of civil society to challenge existing paths and to gain legitimacy through open and democratic R&I processes.

## Conclusion

The sole focus on Missions and the pre-defined steps towards these might shift the attention away from the question of how civil society engages in R&I and how its values, goals and epistemic diversity gets represented. Moving towards the ‘accomplishment’ of Missions becomes an issue of acceptance, i.e., legitimization. Quadruple Helix innovation is an input and throughput-oriented concept. Aiming at legitimacy through governance processes by and with the people mission-orientation shifts the focus to the goals of innovation and how these benefit society, thus to the sphere of output legitimization. As Missions are key in the EU Horizon Europe funding programme, they may become a major point of legitimization for the alignment with needs and values of civil society, while the involvement of

civil society runs a risk of becoming a ‘tick-box exercise’ to serve legitimization purposes. If we agree that actors from civil society are important to tackle wicked problems, such as those aimed at being addressed by Missions, the EC needs to provide frameworks that do not foster token engagement, but promotes responsiveness by providing room for adaption and flexibility, even in (re)defining missions and its milestones to better fit alternative aspirations or sets of values. In order to meaningfully engage actors from civil society, we suggest a shift in orientation to better integrate collaborative process rather than a focus on output only. This would favour designing and implementing policies that address democratic and inclusive research and innovation procedures.



Reconfiguring Research and Innovation Constellations

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