

Project fact sheet 5

User Committees

- **Experimental user committees were organised in five European countries, involving knowledge users in research and innovation.**
- **User committees can help to identify and address drivers and challenges in the societal uptake of near-to-market research and innovation.**
- **They have to be very specific, carefully designed and moderated, with particular attention to the uptake of the results of the deliberations.**

A user committee is a platform for the exchange of knowledge between users and producers in research and innovation. It allows for social impact assessments of near-to-market technological innovations. Researchers, innovators and producers can assess their ideas and expected results against the opinions of societal stakeholders and resolve possible barriers to innovation. The early involvement of professional end users, civil society organisations and citizens enables the incorporation of their views and concerns into technological decision-making, attuning research and innovation to societal needs and values.

NanoDiode user committees

The NanoDiode project organised experimental user committees in five European countries to explore their added value as a governance tool. Each user committee focused on a specific topic:

1. Nanomaterials and nanotechnologies in water and water treatment, organised by IVAM in the Netherlands.
2. Safe by design in nanotech-based products: the nanosilver case, organised by AIRI in Italy.
3. Nanomedicines, organised by BioNanoNet in Austria.
4. Nanotechnologies in building and living, organised by Stuttgart University in Germany.
5. Nanotechnologies for housing and mobility, organised by CEA in France.

The setup of the user committees varied across countries. Dedicated meetings were organized in the Netherlands and Germany, bringing together



Dutch user committee on nanomaterials and nanotechnologies in water and water treatment, October 30th, 2014 in Amersfoort

key players in the topic under debate. In Italy and Austria the user committees were organized in conjunction with relevant research conferences. In France the user committee was embedded in the ongoing discussion on nanotechnologies for renewable energy.

Key findings and recommendations

User committees can help to identify and address drivers and challenges in the societal uptake of near-to-market research and innovation. To be successful, user committees have to be very specific, carefully designed and moderated, with particular attention to the uptake of the results of the deliberations.

Organisation

The successful organization of a user committee requires thorough preparation in terms of the topics under discussion, selection of the participants and

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organisation of the meetings. The committee needs to focus on very specific topics, discussing the research and innovation developments and their expected economic aspects as well as the foreseen societal and environmental impacts and concerns. Relevant players for the user committee have to be identified and motivated to commit to the process and outcomes. As users and producers by definition have different perspectives towards the topic at hand, a balanced discussion of the pros and cons of new developments from different frames of reference requires careful attention to the way the debate is structured. The programme should encourage mutual learning, building on the symmetry of ignorance: the notion that all experts in one field are laymen in most others.

Commitment to the outcomes

The uptake of the outcomes of the debate is another key factor to the success of user committees. This requires a commitment from all participants. Researchers, producers and policy makers have to be willing and able to modulate research and innovation strategies in response to diverging views and interests. Conversely, societal actors have to consider the proportionality of change initiatives in research and innovation trajectories.

The NanoDiode user committees have highlighted opportunities and challenges to the inclusion of a broader range of voices in research and innova-



German user committee on nanotechnologies for building and living, April 20th, 2015 in Stuttgart

tion. User involvement can enhance the responsive capacity of the research and innovation system, supporting the effective governance of nanotechnologies in Europe. The power of users to influence decisions is dependent on the mandate, organisation and timing of their involvement.

MORE INFORMATION



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NanoDiode is a project for outreach and dialogue on nanotechnologies, funded by the European Commission.

From July 2013 to June 2016, NanoDiode has organised a range of engagement activities across Europe, involving stakeholders in a dialogue on the funding, performance and outcomes of nanotechnologies research.

The NanoDiode fact sheets present the different activities carried out as part of the project and discuss the main findings and recommendations. This is nr 5 of a series of 14 fact sheets, see: www.nanodiode.eu/factsheets.



NanoDiode is a Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Union under the NMP Cooperation Work Programme, Grant Agreement n° 608891.