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Deficit, dialogue and beyond: How should research infrastructures relate to their publics?

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There is now a widespread understanding that scientific research does not exist in 'ivory towers', isolated from wider society, but is, and should be, in touch with its users and publics. European countries in particular have emphasised the importance of public engagement as a means of ensuring accountable research, responsible innovation, and well-informed publics (see, for instance, recent discussion of Responsible Research and Innovation in the Horizon 2020 programme).

In this paper I consider what these developments, and in particular different articulations of them such as 'public understanding of science', 'public dialogue', and 'science as culture', mean for PR and communication of large research infrastructure projects. I outline the history of the European turn to dialogue and reflect on the different normative values that are being promoted: should public engagement be viewed as a means of assuring public support? As a way of setting scientific priorities and directions? As an artistic or cultural experiment? Or all of the above? In discussing the different frames through which public engagement can be viewed, and their histories, I aim to start a conversation about the relation between scientific infrastructure, democracy, and public communication.

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