

Opening speech: Building a Scientific Narrative on Impact and Societal Value of Science

The European Parliament understands the value that science brings to society in the current context

In the current turmoil that we are experiencing in Europe, and as a response to ecological, social, demographic and economic challenges, we must look at science not as a separate and fixed world, but as a tool to understand and collectively shape the society we live in.

Both policy makers and practitioners, along with citizens, must understand the value that science brings to society and recognise that science has always been at the origins of societal progress and well-being. We must therefore build this narrative to bring science closer to people.

The future generation of scientists will have to research and create innovative solutions to problems in a fast changing world, and must take on board societal challenges when doing so. Therefore they need to be equipped with creative thinking and communication skills.

Culture and Education as a natural link between Science and Society and a space for common values

I am particularly interested in the deep and ancient links between Arts and Science. In 2015 I hosted an pre COP21 event in the European Parliament highlighting the role of artists in the fight against climate change, and I hosted a session at the 2016 European Science Open Forum in Manchester further developing these ideas.

Prior to being elected in 2014 I worked as a writer and theatre-maker engaging with science topics such as marine engineering and gerontology, working in collaboration with eminent scientists such as the BBC 2002 Reith Lecturer, Professor Tom Kirkwood, and with organisations such as the

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Wellcome Trust. Since becoming an MEP I've worked with a variety of cultural organisations who are engaging with science, such as Brighter Sound, a Manchester music organisation commissioned to work with the Nobel-prize-winning scientists associated with the Graphene Institute, and the artists' collective Satellietgroep based in the Netherlands, who explore the social and ecological impact of the sea and coastal transitions on cities, people, communities and environments, and vice-versa.

Science, like the arts and culture, is part of our “Commons”, and in times of crisis, we must reclaim common goods and values for the benefit of society as a whole, in its diversity.

Education is a natural space where the gap can and must be bridged by dynamic interaction. Indeed, in a changing world, fostering people's capacity for cooperation, critical thinking, curiosity and openness to diversity is now a necessity. Science contributes and can benefit from such an approach. Indeed science and technology cannot progress outside of their economic and societal environments without meaningful connection. Applied research needs out-of-the box thinking and innovative ways of working, especially when financial objectives compel a narrower market-led approach.

As a member of the Culture and Education committee, I advocate and try to put the letter ‘A’ for Arts into STEM thereby making STEAM, and I try to do so directly in the legislation and legal language of the European Parliament.

I believe that in the Commission they have already started to use the acronym START which takes into account the artistic aspect. I am very pleased to see this and hope that the notion will be taken on board at all levels of policy making.

Speaking about this, I would also like to highlight the gender perspective and recall the need to encourage girls and young women to pursue studies and careers in STEAM subjects and increase representation of women in STEM areas.

Need to bridge the gap: for a global policy approach and what does this mean in terms of funding?

I believe that addressing today and tomorrow's challenges requires that the impact of science on other fields and on societies in general is integrated in a transversal way to all policy areas, not just research and development, but all relevant areas, from environment policies, regional development, education and youth policy, employment and social affairs, security and internal affairs to women's rights and gender equality.

A greater and more coherent cooperation between different policy structures and subject areas is needed, not just at EU level but also at national and local level.

We must stop making policies in silos. But this is not a shift of mind that is only required for policy makers, it also needs to be implemented at practitioner level.

Some EU instruments already encourage bridges between science and other policies, both in terms of funding and policy making. Several programmes address the issue. I will highlight what I believe are the main sources of funding for projects encouraging a more global approach reflecting the value that Science brings to society:

The Erasmus + programme: by supporting mobility of students and researchers.

Teachers also need to be better supported in adopting integrating methods, and it can be done through promotion of peer learning and exchange of best practice, as well as easier access to training opportunities. Erasmus provides opportunities for that.

The European Regional Development funds and European Social Funds: in particular support for research, innovation, job creation and training.

The Horizon 2020 programme: the programme provides funding for research projects addressing several “societal challenges” which correspond to different funding strands. In particular, challenge 6: “Europe in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies” might be worth checking for a more creative approach to science.

As a member of the CULT committee, I was approached by the Commission to discuss the potential of the Horizon 2020 programme for promoting research in the field of innovation, arts and culture. The Commission is really eager to promote this broad

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approach for the programme, and has been worried that the scientific community itself was not aware of this funding opportunity.

I am very happy that this session is happening and I look forward to hearing the contribution of the excellent speakers today.