

## EUROPE, SCIENCE AND THE CITY

### ESCITY IS BORN—A NEW NETWORK TO PROMOTE SCIENCE CULTURE LOCALLY AND WILL BE LED BY BARCELONA, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION.

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#### *Abstract*

ESCITY is the acronym of Europe, Science and the City: promoting scientific culture at local level<sup>1</sup>, a project that has received financing from the European Commission's Science and Society Programme. The Barcelona City Council Institute for Culture and the Scientific Communication Observatory of the Pompeu Fabra University are the sponsors of this initiative, the aim of which is to lay down the basis for an international community interested in promoting scientific culture in Europe and with the ability to act as a cultural lobby.

More specifically, the idea is to create the core of a network for the exchange of information and best practices in the area of promoting scientific culture, with two particular characteristics. Firstly, ESCITY focuses on local and regional action and, secondly, it emphasises strategies that situate the promotion of scientific culture under the umbrella of cultural policies. The founder members of this network are representatives of local and regional administrations and social researchers from different European cities.

The project, aims to provide the foundations on which this new community can build its membership progressively and can expand and consolidate beyond the period subsidised by the Sixth Framework Programme.

The project partners and hence the founder members of ESCITY are currently, apart from the Barcelona Institute for Culture and the Scientific Communication Observatory of the Pompeu Fabra University, the Centre for Urban Knowledge Management and Institutional Learning of Vienna (Austria), Tromsø City Council (Norway), the Living Science programme of the Portuguese Ministry for Science and Technology based in Lisbon, and the Observa-Science and Society centre (Vicenza, Italy).

#### **The challenge of bringing together the “two cultures”**

At the *Science in Society Forum*, organised by the European Commission (EC) in Brussels in March 2005<sup>2</sup>, the need was highlighted for a greater institutional understanding in Europe for science to be considered as an integral part of our culture. Despite the progress achieved since the start of the *Science and Society Action Plan* of the EC in 2002, very little has so far been done to blur the borders between the “two cultures” and the fact is that the promotion of scientific culture does not tend to appear on our political agendas. Furthermore, most actions are carried out at national level when the municipal administrations are the ones closest to the citizens and probably the most flexible ones when it comes to incorporating new instruments for involving the public in scientific-cultural actions.

Since the publication of the *Science and Society Action Plan*, several initiatives have been started involving the promotion of scientific culture, yet few of them have the scope of an action plan. In most cases, they are disperse experiences. Too disperse, in fact, to be taken into consideration, even by the governments that develop them, as shown in the Commission's document: *Benchmarking the promotion of RTD culture and public understanding of science (PUS)*<sup>3</sup>. This is primarily due to the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> ESCITY. Europe Science and the City: Promoting Scientific Culture at local level. Project presented to Science and Society-Structuring the ERA; Call FP6-2005-Science-and-society-13.

<sup>2</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conferences/2005/forum2005/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conferences/2005/forum2005/index_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> <http://jinnove.com/upload/documentaire/PP-fe-106.pdf>

promoting scientific culture has not yet become a political matter and therefore does not have a clearly defined place in public policies, but is rather anecdotal.

Moreover, when actions are developed relating to the promotion of scientific culture, they are not framed within the cultural policies (nor do they benefit from the resources) they should be a part of. Let us not forget that we are talking about promoting culture!

ESCITY assumes the goal of influencing government agencies so that they incorporate the cultural promotion of science as another item on their cultural agendas (understood as policies traditionally developed in the area of arts and humanities). As it aims to achieve this at local level because, historically, municipalities have played—and continue to play—a crucial role in promoting culture. In this regard, the town council is the closest administration to the public and has the greatest knowledge and understanding of the characteristics, interests, concerns, and expectations of the community it governs. It thus encapsulates the philosophy and recommendations of the Cultural Agenda 21.<sup>4</sup> The idea of a Cultural Agenda 21, born in Barcelona in May 2004, arose to contribute to formulating responses to the challenges of cultural development facing humanity in the 21st century. The initial idea is very similar to the process developed at the end of the 20th century with regard to the environment, when the realisation that the development models in force preyed excessively on natural resources and ecosystems moved world public opinion as well as governments and international organisations. Today, a similar awareness is arising in the area of culture. It is taking on a central role in globalisation, but without the institutions or instruments for public debate. Today, it is particularly important to develop agreements that defend cultural diversity, the open face of culture, and the importance of cultural creation and participation for everyone.

We are aware that this is an ambitious goal and that it will not be achieved merely in the framework of the project financed by the European Commission—nor was this ever the intention. In its current state, ESCITY concentrates on creating the core of the community that must be able to perform the lobby function mentioned earlier. For this reason, it is not a project that will run out because it is born with a vocation to endure and grow.

## **The city: the protagonist of the promotion of scientific culture**

Following is a presentation of the main objectives of the ESCITY project and the actions we intend to carry out to achieve them. Thus, ESCITY is structured in three large areas:

1. Providing a forum for exchange and debate on scientific culture at European level. This action includes three different specific actions:
  - a. The creation of a permanent space for reflection to allow for more in-depth treatment of policies for spreading scientific knowledge, accompanied by a Web site designed to be a European portal for the promotion of scientific culture.
  - b. Performance by the ESCITY members of a public relations effort to publicise the project and increase membership of the network.
  - c. Organisation of an international meeting to debate with members of the administration and academics the achievements and failings of the promotion of scientific culture in Europe, so that these debates can serve as the basis for expanding action plans at local level.
2. Obtaining clear and accurate knowledge of the state of the promotion of scientific culture at local level in Europe and identifying best practices in this field. These objectives will be achieved by means of a benchmarking study to shed light on an area where the availability of data is currently remarkable for its absence.
3. Initiating a lobby effort to influence the cultural agendas of local and regional governments by facilitating the incorporation of best policy practices in the area of scientific culture. The first action in this regard that is covered by the commitment taken on by the initial project is the publication of a guide, which will be distributed to European governments.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.agenda21delacultura.net](http://www.agenda21delacultura.net)

## From discussion to action

The basic objective of ESCITY, and the main reason for it taking the form of a network, is to encourage the creation of a forum for exchange and debate on scientific culture at European level, paying special attention to the initiatives developed by—and specifically designed for—local and regional governments. But it does not stop there.

It should be mentioned that ESCITY is not a research network or a mere discussion forum. The fact that its members are connected to (local and regional) governments and research institutions will allow a process of interaction to take place whereby knowledge is easily transferred from the academic sector to the institutions capable of putting it to practical uses. In the same way, the practical knowledge gained by the administrations contains extremely valuable information for designing new instruments and appropriate strategies for each specific context. This is the greatest and most innovative contribution of ESCITY.

Thus, ESCITY proposes offering the conditions to bring about the necessary interrelation between the many actors that play a part in promoting culture and science—politicians, civil servants, experts, professionals, academics, etc. This contact is, without doubt, an essential condition for joint initiatives to be forged and for collaborations to arise beyond this two-year project.

The ESCITY embryo, i.e. the partners of the project financed by the CE, form a network and act as a core for gathering and distributing knowledge and best practices. This activity will materialise as a Web site which aims to become the European portal for the promotion of scientific culture. Naturally, it is also likely that the social institutions will also perform this task of distribution in their local, regional and even national contexts. In fact, as some members of ESCITY are governmental agencies, they are in a position to have an effective influence on the diffusion and promotion of best practices in other institutions in their respective countries.

One of the first benefits of creating this platform for spreading knowledge on line is that it is relatively quick and easy to spread the word about locally implemented innovative and interesting actions. Furthermore, the simple fact of being up to date regarding what is going on in our environment is, in and of itself, a source of ideas (as well as help, strategies and instruments) and contributes to prevent “reinventing the wheel”, a common enough phenomenon in projects designed and developed in isolation and having no contact with similar initiatives.

Together with the Internet portal. Another tool that will contribute to the materialisation of the ESCITY community or discussion forum is the organisation of an international meeting that will take place in Barcelona in 2007, the year Barcelona has declared “Year of Science”. The meeting, which will most likely take the form of a workshop, will revolve around the main results of the benchmarking study and its objective will be the drafting of a conclusions document.

It is also likely that this international meeting will act as an advertisement and platform for publicising the ESCITY network, as it will be open to professionals from the whole of Europe and will be one of the events included in Barcelona’s Year of Science programme. Of course, the intention is also to reach out to other organisations working in networks in order to integrate cultural objectives common to us, such as the promotion of scientific culture.

There is, for example, *United Cities and Local Governments*.<sup>5</sup> This organisation, founded in May 2004, is the voice and global defender of local governmental democracy. Based in Barcelona, UCLG is the largest local government organisation in the world. It represents half of the world’s population, the member cities and associations are present in approximately 120 member states of seven large global regions—Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and Western Asia, Latin America and North America. UCLG has 1000 direct member cities and there are an additional 112 national associations that represent all the cities and local governments of a single country.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.cities-localgovernments.org](http://www.cities-localgovernments.org)

Another organisation we would like to work with is *Eurocities*,<sup>6</sup> the network of the main European cities. Founded in 1986, the network has brought together the local governments of more than 120 big cities in more than 30 European countries. *Eurocities* is a platform for each member city to exchange experiences, analyse common problems and develop innovative solutions, by means of forums, work groups, projects, activities and events. *Eurocities* allows cities to have a voice in Europe by establishing dialogues with the European institutions in all aspects of European legislation, policies and programmes that might affect the cities and their citizens. The network actively participates in different political areas: economic development and cohesion policies, public services, environment, transport and mobility, employment and social affairs, culture, education, the information and knowledge society, governability and international cooperation.

We hope that the discussion and debate generated surrounding ESCITY will have a positive impact on the willingness of local governments to, at least, take part in a European network that deals with these matters and be able to design programmes or implement actions that favour the diffusion and promotion of scientific culture in Europe.

### **A forum capable of acting as a lobby**

Knowing what projects, programmes or policies relating to scientific culture are being carried out in different European municipalities and having this information compared systematically would, of course, be of great value to anyone interested in the promotion of scientific culture, whether from an academic, political or professional point of view. For this reason, one of the objectives of ESCITY is to carry out a benchmarking study on the promotion of scientific culture at regional and local level in Europe, particularly with regard to those actions developed from the cultural areas of governments since they would seem to represent a step forward in breaking down the barrier between the “two cultures”, scientific and humanistic.

In accordance with the priorities established by the Commission, the project will also pay special attention to actions aimed at stimulating the interest of young people in science and to the role of women in scientific development. In this process of search and analysis, contact will also be established with other European networks of cities in order to establish synergies with them and to try to find common areas.

Although the first meeting of the partners is to be held in Barcelona at the beginning of April will, among other things, serve to define the design of the study, we already have some ideas as to how it will be carried out. Basically, it will consist of a systematic search for governmental initiatives and programmes already in motion and of establishing a number of parameters that allow these actions to be compared taking into account local contexts. Analysis of the results will provide indications that allow us to identify areas for improvement and draw up suggestions. It will also provide practical information that could be of use to governments carrying out actions promoting scientific culture (or that are thinking of doing so in the future).

As well as shedding light on an area where availability of data is currently remarkable for its absence, a study of these characteristics will contribute to strengthening learning by comparison—of experiences, environments, administrative structures, objectives, instruments, etc. and generally to increasing the sensitivity of local public authorities.

This community of researchers and members of government institutions working on the promotion of scientific culture that is ESCITY was born of a clear and stated interest in acting as a pressure group, a lobby, to extend best practices of government in this field. As a result, this has been the approach to it since it started. As a first step, this lobbying action will take the form of a publication to be distributed to European governments. We think this is a realistic goal, given the scope and resources of the project financed by the EC and the practically embryonic phase of the ESCITY network.

The publication will have the structure of an easy-to-use guide and its contents will be drawn up using the conclusions of the conclusions of the Barcelona meeting, the most relevant aspects of the benchmarking

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<sup>6</sup> [www.eurocities.org](http://www.eurocities.org)

study and a set of instruments and recommendations for local and regional governments. We intend to print approximately six thousand copies to be distributed to local and regional governments in Europe, as well as making it available to a wide audience via the project's Web site. This publication aims to be an instrument that will serve as a stimulus and support in the development of programmes to promote scientific culture and will provide those promoting these programmes with easily accessible consultation material, illustrated with data, experiences and best practices that can serve as a reference for them.

### **Kick-off**

Shortly, the ESCITY project, using the knowledge and resources of its members, hopes to initiate in some cities and transform in others the way scientific culture is promoted. From a practical point of view, this network is born of the double idea of becoming a platform able to influence cultural policy and to serve as a mechanism for coordination among European governments involved in the promotion of science (or interested in it).

To the team promoting the network—the Barcelona Institute for Culture and the Scientific Communication Observatory of the Pompeu Fabra University— this seems like a big challenge and we hope to transmit it as such. In this regard, we would like to say that any contribution from people involved in actions of this kind will be most welcome. So far, the City Council of the Magdeburg in Germany has asked to join the project, even before it has begun. We hope that others will follow their example and ESCITY will quickly increase its membership. We should remember that this project, which is just about to kick off, is open to any institutions involved or merely interested in promoting scientific culture. You will be hearing more from us!