



BigPicnic policy brief 5: Using participatory approaches

BIGPICNIC TOPIC



PARTICIPATORY
APPROACHES

FOOD 2030 PRIORITIES



INNOVATION

SDGs



United Nations Sustainable
Development Goals

Recommendations

Overall: Use participatory approaches to raise unheard voices and broaden our perception of expertise.

- Build new knowledge and create value, for all concerned, through open and inclusive research and public engagement processes.
- Involve the larger 'eco-system' (e.g. audiences, green organisations, researchers and industry) to allow all key players to work together.
- Leave your site to get easier access to and build relationships with new audiences. Don't expect them to come to you.
- Focus on creating strong, lasting relationships with a deeper, more sophisticated, engagement rather than on reaching more people.
- Open up the research process and co-create across the organisation to build a knowledge base, foster ownership of a topic, gain support for projects and create leverage for the results.

Background

Working towards a food secure, sustainable future and achieving all of the Food 2030 priorities and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires cross sectoral collaboration which includes the involvement of the public and community groups. Informal learning sites are uniquely placed to act as hubs to bring stakeholders together to discuss, set research priorities and design a sustainable future.

Informal learning sites have access to scientific and other expertise and have skills in bringing people together to learn and experience. Thus it is important that these spaces, like botanic gardens, respond to their mandate for developing a neutral space for dialogue to increase knowledge and inform policy. Achieving this requires a participatory approach to research, public engagement and project development.



Findings

Through the dialogues supported by the exhibitions and participatory events co-created as part of BigPicnic, the Partners have highlighted the potential for informal learning sites to foster multi-stakeholder collaboration. Participants highlighted that food security has a political dimension which links to other policy domains and that there are hidden topics, such as affordability of food, packaging, health and chronic diseases that need to be considered. Project Partners found that the public is keen to be involved in setting research priorities and in decision-making about food issues.

People engaged stressed the importance of food in relation to memory and the expression of national identity. Accessing and preserving knowledge from local actors was also valued along with the opportunity to construct and co-create knowledge. BigPicnic Partners found that food stories were able to bring people together, trigger recognition and create actionable perspectives in visitors. Co-creation was found to change the relationship of audiences to the topic. In addition, attitude change towards food and food security topics were also observed in the public and professionals that participated.

Co-creation creates value on multiple levels, it does not necessarily lead to predictable results - freedom, creativity, flexibility and, above all, perseverance need to be part of the process. Participatory engagement in BigPicnic (applied research and co-creation activities) helped to level playing fields between those who we traditionally consider to be experts and those who hold different, important forms of knowledge. Project Partners found that it is important to acknowledge, whether financially, or otherwise, the important contribution that each actor makes. The combination of Team-Based Inquiry (a participatory approach to applied research) and co-creation used in BigPicnic were deemed to be highly complementary approaches which reflect the ethos of Responsible Research and Innovation and supported Partners to enhance their project outcomes and capture the conversations raised by them.

Quote

“Co-creation, even more participation”

I had not reflected on the possibility of planning cultural events, educational strategies, and hypotheses of institutional development directly with the recipients before. Yet it might seem like a logical process, but before the BigPicnic project this had happened just by chance. It was a discovery, intentionally putting people around a table who will then benefit from the proposals of the Botanical Garden, to feel their opinions not after having organised an exhibition or another event, but even before having conceived it.

Co-creation processes led to several installations within a mobile exhibition on secure, responsible and biodiverse food, but also to the adoption of our tropical plants in pots for the winter season by schools because our greenhouse is too small and more.

It's like cooking not for your guests but with your guests. This allows you to find out what their tastes are, their skills and preferences, and to share yours. You make them feel more protagonists, even if the ingredients, the house, the appliances make them dependent on you. It is different if you prepare everything yourself, imagining what their tastes may be, or how to prepare the table or dishes. This is more comfortable and maybe faster, but co-creation is more creative, participatory, socializing. It is not necessarily that everything always works perfectly, but it also offers surprises and solutions that you could not have imagined.

Gabriele Rinaldi,
Director, Bergamo Botanic Garden

Big Picnic

The full set of BigPicnic policy briefs is available on our website

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