

- **No. 06**
- **Biosense: collaborative initiatives to bring the life sciences and social sciences to society**

- Name: **Irina**
- First Name: **Castro**
- E-Mail: belacastro@ces.uc.pt
- Organisation: **Centre for Social Studies, Associate Laboratory , University of Coimbra. Coimbra, Portugal (1) and Institute for Molecular and Cell Biology, Associate Laboratory, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal (2)**

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- Authors: **Irina Castro(1), Daniel Neves(1), Rita Serra(1), José Borlido Santos(2), Sónia Martins(2), Sandra Silva(2), JoãoArriscadoNunes(1).**

- **Abstract:**

- The increasing complexity of the engagement of science with the public stimulates today the search for new types of approaches to the understanding of science, science education and research, on the one hand, and concerns, experiences and public knowledge's, on the other. Initiatives like Science Shops or Community Based Participatory Research are key to the enactment of innovative dialogues between science, different publics and communities. Through different forms of action research, these initiatives broaden the space for collaborative projects at the intersections of the social sciences and life sciences in the domains of health and environment. In this way, scientists and diverse publics can work together to identify problems and design, implement and assess adequate responses through the mobilization of appropriate resources and modes of knowledge. Despite the diversity of experiences and organizational models worldwide, these initiatives are asymmetrically distributed. Portugal is a country with no tradition in these initiatives. The authors here report the creation of a unit inspired by these experiences, which is currently promoting a number of participatory action-research projects. Some of the projects supported include patient organisations and organizations linked to the promotion of the rights of persons with different types of disabilities or potentially stigma-generating conditions, immigrant communities and schools, among others, with the aim of demonstrating the innovative features and the potentialities of the approaches. The project "(BioSense) Science Engaging Society: Life Sciences, Social Sciences and Publics", funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, aims at creating and implementing this unit within the Portuguese Universities and research centres. Therefore the project involves the efforts of two Portuguese Universities through the cooperation of the Institute for Molecular and Cell Biology of the University of Porto and the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra. As part of the implementation strategies, working partnerships were established with other research institutions, as well as with PhD students, postdoctoral fellows and with research and outreach projects. An online platform for the sharing of experiences and information on ongoing projects and a range of initiatives for the

training of facilitators for collaborative work and for methodologies for collaborative research are also part of the current activities developed as part of BioSense.