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## **First regional workshop in PLACES project gets project off to good start**

The workshop was an opportunity for Birmingham to promote the activities of the Thinktank Science Museum and the strategies and policies of Birmingham Science City. The afternoon session was an opportunity to compare different cities and regions on their policies and activities in science communication and then involved the 40 participants in group work and a lively discussion exploring the key components of the strategies and policies. The findings of the workshop will contribute to a state-of-the-art study on science communication policies.

ERRIN is playing a major role in the PLACES project and is involving nine regions in the network in the project. Although the FP7 project formally started in June 2010 and held a conference in October on 'Science and the City', the Birmingham workshop trail blazed the regional dimension of the project – namely to compare science communication policies and recommend future training to stakeholders in the regions. Each region will organise a regional workshop examining science communication and science policy. The first workshop of the nine was held in Birmingham at the Thinktank Museum on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2011 and involved 41 participants from across Europe.

The workshop was opened by **Jill Robinson**, CASC advisor and then on behalf of the hosting region, **Norman Price**, Birmingham Science City Partnership Board Chair, welcomed the participants by presenting the various flourishing innovative sectors that mark Birmingham's economic growth such as healthcare, materials, security, transport, etc.

**Antonio Gomes da Costa** reported on the administrative difficulties of the start of the PLACES project and welcomed this first regional workshop which marks a symbolic start for the PLACES project. He pointed out that PLACES goes a step further in science communication and targets public engagement encouraging people to consider science as part of their life. PLACES does not aim at a top-down approach but a real bottom-up approach, needs, requirements that come from the public.

In his speech, **Norman Price** highlighted the achievements of Birmingham Science City which has an overarching vision of improving the quality of life for the region. According to Norman Price, we need to embed science in the culture of the society and endeavour for a better quality of life which is a fundamental driver in modern society.

**Tim Caulton** from the Thinktank introduced Thinktank Science Museum and then **Jackie Homan**, Birmingham Science City Manager outlined the governance structure of Birmingham Science City and its four priorities: Digital society, Low carbon technologies, Advanced materials and Security

The **afternoon session**, moderated by **Gren Messham**, broke the participants into six tables to encourage dialogue and debate. Five case studies were presented from Magdeburg, Espoo, Murcia, Wroclaw and Glasgow. Each case study illustrated a different viewpoint on science communication policy based on objectives and the historical context. For example, Magdeburg and Glasgow were industrial cities that need to reinvent themselves, Espoo had the advantage of working with innovative companies in its boundaries and both Murcia and Wroclaw were able to present how they approached the concept of a science festival.

The main conclusions drawn from the workshop was the importance of a clear understanding and an agreement on the objectives of the strategy linked then to a clear set of activities and processes based on the resources available such as science centres, etc. One of the key questions that came up regularly in the discussion was how policies in this domain were evaluated to make sure a European added-value was achieved. There were many good ideas presented but much less information on the funding involved and this was an obviously important area of debate. Clarity on funding and rigorous evaluations open up a wider debate on benefits and value for money especially in times where there is a clear interest in investing in EU priorities (e.g. priorities based on grand challenges).

One of the more interesting points that came from the workshop was the fact that all cities and regions present at Birmingham welcomed international contacts whether informally or through European projects.

Finally, after a very productive day, Antonio Gomes Da Costa in his closing remarks reminded the audience of the objectives of PLACES. PLACES is not merely science communication, but goes far beyond this and addresses communication policy and targets politicians and policy makers.

The PLACES Project:

PLACES is an FP7 Science in Society project over 4 years worth over €5 million. The project's objective is to create and promote the concept of the European City of Scientific Culture and will create a platform of science communicators. Throughout the four-year cooperation, partnerships between policy makers, scientists and science communicators will be established that will sustain future collaboration.

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