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# THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF SCIENCE

As in Latin America, science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had serious difficulties and backdrops during the permanence in power of authoritarian regimes. The reappearance of Spain in the scientific world scene after Franco's government is noteworthy. But, to what extent, and how, are science and technology appreciated by the Spanish society?

The results of the sixth edition of the National Survey on the Social Perception of Science and Technology were published this month. The survey is carried out by the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT, for its Spanish acronym). This is a foundation of public nature dependent on the State Secretary for Research, Development and Innovation, which in turn is part of the Ministry for Economy and Competitiveness of Spain. FECYT handles the communication and dissemination of science and technology.

The Spanish National Survey represents an initiative that could very well be followed by the governmental organisms for science and technology and/or by the associations for the advancement of science in our region. The survey was started in 2002 and it reports every two years data about the interest of society for science, the scientific training level of the population, the image that the public has of science, the support they give to its financing and the opinions that they have about the media regarding scientific information. The continuity and the periodicity of this activity allow to present temporal series where the evolution in these different aspects and the statistical and social significance of the changes and progressions detected can be appreciated.

Among the numerous interesting facts that this sixth survey reveals are the continued growth in time of the interest for science, and particularly in the last biennium in the youth between 15 and 24 years old, and also in people of 55 to 65 years. Although the opinion regarding their scientific education (42% judge it defective) is similar between men and women, it is surprising that the interest for science in men doubles that of women.

While physicians, researchers, professors and engineers occupy the first positions as to the validation of their activity by society, priests and politicians occupy the last positions. On the other hand, although an important majority of the surveyed population consider that scientific progress leads to improvements in the quality of life, economic development and, in general, to life in society, there is no such majority inasmuch as the reduction of differences between rich and poor countries is concerned.

It is very auspicious that over 80% of the Spaniards support that the public investments in science and technology be maintained or increased, while almost 60% considers that the private enterprise does not invest sufficiently in these areas. The survey reveals that for a higher level of scientific education the support for public and private investments for science increases. Among the priorities for an increased public expenditure, science and technology occupy the second place, only exceeded by public safety, but for Spaniards between 15 to 44 years old it becomes the first option.

Insofar as the use of the different communications media as a primary source of scientific and technological information, internet reaches the first place for the first time, ahead of television and other media, with a notable increase in the social networks as an information source, with a clear preponderance among those younger than 25 years. Of all the media, the science dissemination journals are the ones that inspire more confidence in the Spaniard population as the source of scientific information.

Undoubtedly, such ways to portray the role of science and technology in society will allow authorities and scientists to reach a better and more effective planning and, thus, a larger impact.

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