

## Translating Legalese: Communicating Legal Insights for Public Understanding

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**Abstract:** Communicating legal research to non-specialist audiences is a valuable way of disseminating the results carried out in academia. Indeed, the dissemination of science plays important roles bridging the gap between legal research and general public, taking legal information to lay audiences (such as citizens and the community in general). Operators of the legal sciences should therefore endeavour to develop science communication strategies in parallel with their research, helping strengthen science so that it can fulfil its real role. Starting from these premises, the paper will first address the importance of communicating legal research to non-specialist stakeholders based on the study cases on wildland fires and energy communities. Secondly, using the inductive method, the work will analyse different strategies for reaching these audiences and delivering the message in the most effective way. By presenting these conclusions, the paper aims to contribute to communication in legal science.

**Keywords:** communication strategies, energy communities, science communication, wildland fires

**Basic ideas:**

- The relevance of communicating legal science;
- Non-specialist audiences in case studies on wildland fires and energy communities;
- Strategies for communicating legal science to the public.

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## Introduction

In today's information age, the ability to convey legal insights to a non-audience is more valuable than ever. By adopting understandable language, researchers can break down barriers and make legal concepts more approachable for the general public (Lin et al., 2023). This outreach not only enhances public legal literacy but also fosters a sense of civic engagement, empowering individuals to make informed decisions in their personal and professional lives.

Effectively communicating legal research to non-specialist audiences serves as a crucial tool for bridging the gap between academia and the wider public (Salmon & Hoop, 2019). While scholarly work often resides within the confines of specialized journals and academic circles, its societal impact can be amplified when shared in accessible formats. The dissemination of legal research beyond the realm of experts contributes to increased public awareness and understanding of complex legal issues.

Moreover, communicating legal research to non-specialist audiences facilitates a more democratic and inclusive discourse surrounding legal matters. It ensures that the benefits of rigorous academic inquiry are not confined to scholarly circles but are made available to a broader cross-section of society (Fährnich et al., 2021). This two-way communication allows for valuable insights from diverse perspectives, enriching the overall understanding of legal issues and fostering a more inclusive legal system.

Understanding legal science provides the general public with a range of valuable benefits. When individuals grasp the fundamentals of legal science, they gain insights that are instrumental in navigating various aspects of society.

Legal science promotes legal literacy among the public. It equips individuals with the knowledge needed to comprehend the laws that govern their daily lives, from contractual agreements to criminal statutes. This increased legal literacy empowers people to make informed decisions, ensuring they are aware of their rights and responsibilities in different situations (Zariski, 2014).

Furthermore, an understanding of legal science fosters a sense of civic responsibility. Informed citizens are better positioned to engage with legal and ethical issues that affect their communities. This engagement may take the form of participating in public debates, advocating for legal reforms, or contributing to discussions on topics such as human rights, privacy, and justice. In this way, legal science becomes a tool for active citizenship and civic participation.

Legal science also plays a crucial role in promoting social justice. It provides the framework for individuals to recognize and challenge legal inequalities and injustices. Armed with legal knowledge, the public can advocate for changes in the law and legal practices that contribute to a fair and equitable society. This aspect of legal science contributes to the overall well-being of communities by fostering a more just and inclusive legal system.

As legal knowledge becomes more accessible and comprehensible to all, it becomes a powerful tool for individuals to actively participate in shaping a legal system that aligns with principles of fairness, equality, and the common good.

On the other hand, effective science communication in legal research to public policy authorities is crucial for fostering informed decision-making and shaping legislation that aligns with societal needs. Clear and accessible communication ensures that complex legal findings are comprehensible to policymakers, facilitating the integration of evidence-based insights into the policymaking process.

By bridging the gap between legal research and public policy, communication serves as a catalyst for the creation of laws that are not only legally sound but also address pressing social issues. This transparency enhances public trust in the legal system and strengthens the democratic foundation by promoting an understanding of how legal research directly influences the development of policies that impact citizens' lives.

Thus, having already demonstrated the relevance of legal science communication above, the paper will now analyse case studies in the field of legal science, identify the main recipients of the legal content in these cases and, at the end, discuss the different strategies for reaching these audiences, according to their specificities.

### **1. Non-specialised audiences in research projects on forest fires and energy communities**

To better illustrate the relevance of communicating legal science to non-specialised audiences and to characterize possible recipients of the legal information, this work will focus on two different case studies: wildland fires legal research and energy communities legal research.

Regarding the first example, the main stakeholders involved are political agents, civil protection agents and the local community in general (Portuguese fire regulation system, see art. 5, Portuguese Federal Decree n. 82/2021). These players are the recipients of the information provided by academic projects dedicated to improving understanding of these fires, and to defining strategies that will allow better characterisation of the problem, among other objectives. Given that the phenomenon of forest fires is a multidisciplinary phenomenon, it requires solutions from different branches of science such as geology, geography, biology, engineering, agriculture, environmental sciences and law. The legal part of the research consists precisely in the creation of rules and disciplining behaviors that will help in reducing these fires.

The stakeholders mentioned above are not only responsible for receiving the legal information, but also for processing it and acting on it in practice. Therefore, each stakeholder plays a different part in contributing towards the eradication of this problem. Policy makers and legislators often make important decisions that require scientific evidence. On the other hand, civil protection agents and the community in general need to be informed of the legal determinations to adjust their behaviors and act in accordance with these impositions, so that the results sought by legislators and public policy makers can be achieved. At the end of the day, all the recipients must receive proper legal information so that the factual situation can be effectively transformed.

To effectively communicate the legal norms regarding bonfires in rural areas, particularly in municipalities with a “very high” or “maximum” rural fire danger level, a comprehensive

communication strategy is essential. Leveraging multiple communication channels such as social media platforms, local newspapers, community bulletin boards, and radio broadcasts ensures widespread dissemination of information. Visual aids such as infographics and posters can help convey the message clearly and succinctly. Additionally, organizing community workshops or information sessions facilitated by local authorities or fire safety experts can provide an interactive platform for residents to learn about the regulations and ask questions. Tailoring the messaging to resonate with the local community is crucial. Highlighting the potential risks and consequences of unauthorized bonfires, including the threat of wildfires and damage to property and natural habitats, can underscore the importance of compliance with the regulations. Emphasizing the role of community members in protecting their environment and ensuring public safety fosters a sense of collective responsibility. Furthermore, employing culturally relevant communication strategies, such as incorporating local traditions and values into the messaging, can enhance engagement and comprehension among residents. Collaborating with community leaders, influencers, and grassroots organizations to endorse and amplify the message adds credibility and fosters trust. Regular updates and reminders through various communication channels help reinforce awareness and compliance over time. Providing access to resources such as online portals or hotlines for inquiries and reporting can facilitate transparency and accountability. Overall, a multifaceted communication strategy that prioritizes clarity, relevance, and community engagement is essential for making socially perceptible the legal norms regarding bonfires in rural areas and promoting responsible behavior among residents.

Another example of the relevance of communication of legal science in practice is the case study of renewable energy communities. These communities can be a useful tool to help the transition of the energy system in Europe, increasing energy efficiency and renewable shares.

The Directive 2018/2001, art. 2, 16, defines renewable energy communities as legal entities in which:

- (a) in accordance with the applicable national law, is based on open and voluntary participation, is autonomous, and is effectively controlled by shareholders or members that are located in the proximity of the renewable energy projects that are owned and developed by that legal entity;
- (b) the shareholders or members of which are natural persons, SMEs or local authorities, including municipalities;
- (c) the primary purpose of which is to provide environmental, economic or social community benefits for its shareholders or members or for the local areas where it operates, rather than financial profits;

Following the publication of the European directives on energy communities (Directive 2018/2001 & Directive 2019/944) some member countries have sought to implement policies to make it easier for citizens to create energy communities, to provide a favourable environment and a level playing field with other energy supply models.

Unlike in the case of forest fires, in this case study, the scientific knowledge about energy communities' regulations comes top down, since the European Commission (2019) has been

guiding the Member States through the directives of the Clean Energy for All Europeans Package (CEP), which includes aspects regarding new energy market design, energy transition, governance regulation, etc. This means that a large part of the normative content related to the creation and development of renewable energy communities was first created at European level and then regulated by the member states at the most varied administrative levels. The main European Directives that contain the definition of the two types of energy communities are the Renewable Energy Directive 2018/2001 (defines Renewable Energy Communities – RECs) and the Market of Electricity Directive 2019/944 (defines Citizen Energy Communities – CECs).

In addition to the Member States, there are other important stakeholders involved in the communication of legal research about energy communities such as regulators, individual self-consumers, jointly acting renewables self-consumers, local citizens and local authorities, renewable energy communities and civil networks. Heldeweg and Saintier (2020) point out that:

Civil networks that combine collaborative and sharing relationships with the pursuit of social or community interests. They are present themselves through voluntary civil society, not-for-profit collaboration in co-productive or sharing networks, with safeguards for social inclusion and non-discrimination of not-for-profit services. Examples are the networks of NGOs in religious, cultural, and professional life, in welfare, care, political and social awareness and mobilisation, and for our purpose, for renewable energy community initiatives. Together the latter initiatives display as a polycentric mode of bottom-up collective action that, by ‘blending’ with top-down approaches, can successfully contribute to coping with the global challenge of climate change through a just energy transition. (p. 4)

The dearth of legal literacy within the domain of energy communities presents a substantive obstacle to the proficient provision of legal counsel and advocacy. Energy communities, comprising entities or associations engaged in the generation of renewable energy for localized consumption, necessitate adept legal acumen to navigate intricate regulatory frameworks, negotiate contractual agreements, and ensure regulatory adherence. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of legal practitioners lack specialized expertise in energy law, impeding their capacity to furnish tailored guidance and assistance to such communities. This lacuna may engender misunderstandings, legal disputes, and missed opportunities pertaining to sustainable energy development. Addressing this lacuna through targeted training initiatives and the provision of specialized resources is imperative to equip legal professionals with the requisite competencies to aptly serve the interests of energy communities and foster the advancement of renewable energy modalities.

Directive (EU) 2018/2001 establishes the importance of providing information on how supported electricity is allocated to final consumers. In order to improve the quality of this information to consumers, Member States should ensure that guarantees of origin exist for all renewable energy units produced, unless they decide not to issue guarantees of origin to producers who also receive financial support. This type of technical information should be communicated and made socially perceptible to the citizens. Similarly, according to the Directive (EU) 2018/2001, “consumers should be provided with comprehensive information, including information on the energy performance of heating and cooling systems and on the lower running costs of electric vehicles, to allow them to make individual consumer choices”.



All these recipients of the legal content about renewable energy communities and wildland fires have different characteristics and require different science communication strategies, as we will see in detail below.

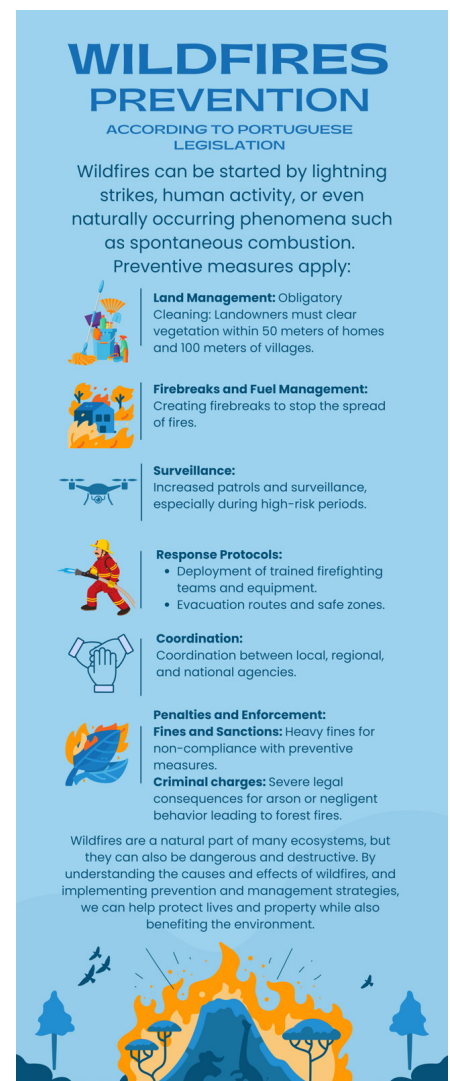
## 2. Different stakeholders and different legal research communication strategies

Tailoring legal research communication strategies to different stakeholders is essential due to the diverse needs, perspectives, and levels of expertise among them. Adapting strategies based on stakeholders ensures that legal research effectively meets the informational needs of each group, maximizing its impact and relevance in various contexts.

On the case study of forest fires, communicating legal research to civil protection agents requires a focused and practical approach. The key is to translate legal findings into actionable insights that can directly inform and enhance their operational strategies. Complex legal data should be distilled into clear, concise briefings that highlight the most relevant legal frameworks, regulations, and policies related to forest fire prevention and management. These briefings should be tailored to the specific legal context of the region and include any recent legislative changes or court rulings that could impact forest fire protocols. Utilizing visual aids, such as infographics or flowcharts, can help in simplifying and emphasizing critical legal points.

### Image 1

*Example of infographic with Portuguese forest fire legislation content*



*Note.* Designed by the author.

Also, interactive workshops or training sessions can be highly effective, providing a platform for civil protection agents to engage with legal experts, ask questions, and discuss how legal requirements intersect with on-ground realities. Incorporating scenario-based learning, where agents can apply legal knowledge to hypothetical situations, can help in understanding the practical implications of legal rules.

Furthermore, creating a collaborative forum, either online or in person, where agents can share experiences, challenges, and best practices related to legal compliance in forest fire management can foster a community of learning and compliance. Regular updates and continuous education are essential, as laws and policies may evolve, especially in response to changing environmental conditions and new insights into fire management. This strategy not only ensures that civil protection agents are well-informed about the legal landscape but also empowers them to perform their duties more effectively and in compliance with the law.

As for the local communities, effectively communicating legal science related to forest fires demands a strategy that is both informative and engaging. The primary focus should be on simplifying complex legal terminologies and concepts into language that is easily understandable by non-specialists. This can be achieved through the creation of accessible, user-friendly materials such as brochures, flyers, or infographics that outline legal obligations, rights, and best practices in forest fire prevention and response.

**Image 2**

*Example of brochure with wildland fires prevention content*



*Note.* Designed by the author.

Hosting community meetings or workshops, possibly in collaboration with local authorities and fire departments, provides a valuable opportunity for direct interaction, where legal aspects can be discussed in a context relevant to the community’s specific environment and concerns. Using local media channels – including newspapers, radio, and social media – can amplify the

reach of legal information, ensuring it is widely disseminated and accessible. Storytelling can be a powerful tool in this regard, where real-life examples or case studies of forest fire incidents and their legal aftermath are shared, helping the community to grasp the practical implications of legal compliance and negligence.

### Image 3

*Example of legal information in the local newspaper O Público*

NATUREZA

## Sintra quer criar um plano para proteger o vale da Adraga em que junta toda a gente

A Câmara Municipal de Sintra está a pedir o contributo de todos no desenvolvimento de um plano para gestão e restauro ecológico do vale da Adraga, que tem um elevado risco de incêndio.

Teresa Serafim

19 de Abril de 2024, 19:16



O Vale da Adraga tem cerca de 70 hectares DR

*Note.* From Newspaper O Público, by Serafim, T., 2024

Engaging local schools and educational programs can also play a crucial role in raising awareness among younger generations, fostering a culture of legal awareness and responsibility from an early age. Regular updates and reminders, especially during high-risk seasons, keep the community informed and vigilant.

Importantly, this communication should be a two-way street, where feedback and concerns from the community are actively sought and addressed, ensuring that the legal information provided is not only understood but also valued and applied.

With regard to communicating legal science to local authorities, both in the case of forest fires and in the case of energy communities, a strategic approach that blends clarity, relevance, and engagement is required. The information must be presented in a plain manner, avoiding legal jargon to ensure comprehensibility. Tailoring the content to the specific needs and concerns of the local authorities is crucial; this involves identifying the legal issues most pertinent to their jurisdiction and responsibilities.

Interactive presentations, such as workshops or seminars, can be more effective than written reports, as they allow for real-time questions and discussions. Employing case studies and examples from similar localities can make the material more relatable and demonstrate practical applications. In addition, providing concise summaries or actionable recommendations can help authorities understand the immediate steps they can take. Regular follow-ups and the establishment



of open communication channels encourage ongoing dialogue and enable local authorities to seek clarification on legal matters as they arise. This approach not only educates but also empowers local authorities, fostering a proactive attitude towards legal compliance and governance.

When it comes to communicating legal science to EU Member States in the context of energy communities, it is essential to employ a multifaceted approach. Legal researchers should collaborate closely with relevant governmental bodies and agencies within each member state to ensure that the findings and implications of their research align with local legal frameworks and policy objectives.

This involves active engagement in policy discussions, providing expert insights, and participating in consultations to shape legislation and regulations that promote energy community development. Researchers can utilize modern communication tools such as webinars, online workshops, and interactive websites to disseminate their research findings widely, ensuring accessibility to a diverse audience.

Moreover, the use of case studies and practical examples that showcase the successful implementation of energy community models within specific member states can serve as powerful tools for illustrating the real-world impact and feasibility of legal science research. By combining these strategies, legal researchers can foster greater awareness, understanding, and acceptance of energy communities as a viable and sustainable solution across EU member states.

Effectively communicating legal science to regulators of energy communities requires a strategic and collaborative approach. Legal scholars and researchers should engage in ongoing dialogues with regulatory authorities, fostering relationships built on trust and mutual understanding.

By actively participating in regulatory discussions, researchers can provide valuable insights and expertise to help shape policies and regulations that align with the evolving landscape of energy communities. The use of transparent communication is essential, translating complex legal research into easily digestible summaries and actionable recommendations that resonate with regulators.

Hosting targeted workshops, seminars, or training sessions for regulatory bodies can also facilitate knowledge transfer and ensure that regulators are well-informed about the latest legal developments in the field. Eventually, an open and cooperative relationship between legal researchers and regulators can lead to more informed and effective decision-making, promoting the growth and sustainability of energy communities while adhering to legal frameworks and standards.

When it comes to communicating legal science to local citizens, a key strategy is to make the information accessible, relatable, and engaging. Legal scholars and researchers should aim to bridge the gap between complex legal concepts and the everyday lives of citizens. This can be achieved through community outreach initiatives such as town hall meetings, workshops, and information sessions, where researchers can explain legal issues in plain language and provide real-life examples that resonate with local concerns and interests. Making use of multimedia tools, such as informative videos, infographics, and user-friendly websites, can further enhance accessibility and capture the attention of a broader audience. Encouraging active participation and feedback from citizens in the legal research process can also empower them to feel more connected to the subject matter. In the long run, the goal is to empower local citizens with a

better understanding of legal science, enabling them to make informed decisions, advocate for their rights, and actively participate in the legal processes that impact their communities.

Communicating legal science to civil networks, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), requires a nuanced strategy that respects their diverse perspectives and operational scopes. A key strategy is to establish a common language, bridging the gap between legal terminology and the everyday language used by these organizations. This involves simplifying complex legal concepts without losing their essence, ensuring that the information is both accessible and accurate. Tailoring communication to the specific interests and goals of each NGO enhances relevance; for instance, an organization focused on environmental issues would benefit from legal insights pertaining to environmental regulations and policies. Interactive and participatory formats, like workshops or roundtable discussions, can foster a collaborative environment where legal experts and NGO members exchange ideas and experiences, enhancing mutual understanding.

Resorting to case studies or success stories from other civil networks can provide practical examples of legal science application, offering inspiration and concrete models for action. Providing resources such as guides, toolkits, or webinars customized to NGOs can offer ongoing support. Finally, establishing long-term relationships with these organizations through regular updates and consultations can create a sustained impact, helping them to navigate legal challenges and advocate more effectively for their causes. This approach not only disseminates legal knowledge but also empowers civil networks to use this knowledge in their advocacy and operations.

Communicating legal science to renewable energy self-consumers involves a targeted approach that addresses their unique context and needs. The communication must demystify legal terminologies and regulations related to renewable energy, presenting them in a straightforward, easy-to-understand manner. This could involve creating simplified guides or FAQs that explain key legal concepts, rights, and obligations in the context of self-consumption.

Interactive tools such as webinars or online forums can be particularly effective, offering a platform for self-consumers to ask specific questions and receive made-to-order advice. It's also beneficial to illustrate the practical implications of these laws through real-life examples or case studies that relate directly to the experiences of self-consumers. Another effective strategy is to collaborate with local renewable energy communities or associations, which can act as intermediaries to disseminate legal information in a more accessible way.

These communities can provide feedback on the types of legal challenges their members face, allowing for more focused and relevant communication. Moreover, offering ongoing support and updates about legal changes in the renewable energy sector is crucial, as this area is rapidly evolving. By employing these strategies, legal experts can empower self-consumers with the knowledge they need to navigate the legal landscape of renewable energy, ensuring compliance and encouraging informed decision-making.

These are, therefore, some of the strategies designed for the stakeholders highlighted in this work.

### **3. Final remarks**

In conclusion, the importance of communicating legal research to non-specialist audiences cannot be overstated. It serves as a vital tool for disseminating the findings and insights derived from rigorous academic studies. In today's interconnected world, the role of science communication is more crucial than ever, as it facilitates the translation of complex legal research into accessible and understandable information for government authorities, the broader community, and various stakeholders.

Through practical examples like the cases of research on wildland fires and renewable energy communities, this work have demonstrated that bridging the gap between legal science and the general public is not only desirable but also necessary. These examples illustrate the real-world implications of legal research and how it can impact the lives of individuals, communities, and society as a whole.

To effectively communicate legal research to non-specialist audiences, legal scholars and researchers must adopt science communication strategies as an integral part of their work. These strategies may encompass comprehensible language, engaging visuals, and outreach efforts that extend beyond traditional academic circles. By doing so, legal researchers can make their work accessible and relevant to a wider audience, contributing to a more informed and engaged society.

In summary, the dissemination of legal research to non-specialist stakeholders is a shared responsibility that can empower society, inform policymaking, and ultimately strengthen the field of legal science. As researchers, let us recognize the importance of this endeavor and commit ourselves to developing effective communication strategies alongside our scholarly pursuits. By doing so, we can help legal science fulfill its true role in advancing knowledge, promoting justice, and serving the greater good.

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