

INPACT Priority XI
Science Communication
(The Value of Evidence in the Digital Age)

Notes from 1st Working Group Meeting
11 October 2016, European Parliament, Brussels
Hosted by Paul Rübzig (EPP, A) & Eva Kaili (S&D, GR)

....

MEP Stewards: Paul Rübzig (EPP, A), Eva Kaili (S&D, GR)

Statements made by:

Erika Widegren, Chairman of the Advisory Board, REIsearch
Graeme Taylor, Director of Public Affairs, European Crop Protection Association
Volker Stollorz, Managing Director, Science Media Center, Germany
Sofie Vanthournout, Director, Sense about Science EU
Daniel Mediavilla, Science Journalist, El País
Wolfgang Burtscher, Deputy Director General, DG Research & Innovation, EC

Objective: Ensure an effective and reliable science communication

Participants see below

Summary

Recent global events have put science communication at the forefront of political discussions. Science communication is not any more a discussion only among scientists but is something that is relevant for any policy debate. Science is everywhere and unless the complexity and facts can be transmitted to the public, the role of evidence in decision-making is always going to remain marginal. In this way, perhaps the German word Wissenschaft is more appropriate in setting the tone for this debate.

The debate that followed tried to answer some specific questions as well as looking at what the different roles of science on the one hand, and media on the other is in trying to better science communication.

Key discussion points

How can science and media work better together to improve communicating science to the European citizens?

- It was clear from the debate that the relationship between science and media presents some clear challenges. Wolfgang Burtscher stressed that researchers are often not able to communicate effectively how their work relates to the broader interests of society and what the benefits are.

- Paul Rübige stressed the important role of the media to support scientists in communicating their results and to avoid that their messages are “lost in translation”.
- However the current challenges that the media environment is facing, with smaller budgets and fewer journalists having to do more and more underlined the need to look at what structural support mechanisms could be put in place to support media in this regard.
- Volker Stollorz presented how the German Science Media Centre is doing precisely that at a German level, acting as a support centre for scientists to work with journalists and journalists to have access to reliable and authoritative science. Quoting Fiona Fox, Chief Executive of Science Media Center: “the media will do science better, when science does media better”.
- Such a structure can also help to improve trust between experts and journalists. As Daniel Mediavilla mentioned, scientists are often scared to deal with media, as their words could be misinterpreted or misreported.
- Volker Stollorz reiterated the need to engage truth-seeking scientists and truth-seeking journalists. More evidence-based journalism will result in a healthy science communication environment.

What is the role and responsibility of each actor?

- Daniel Mediavilla stressed that the role of science journalists is to make science understandable and, at the same time, to be critical on information that is not truly scientific.
- Volker Stollorz stressed that scientists need to be willing to join the debate when the public is listening.
- Erika Widegren mentioned that in a public engagement campaign done by the European Institute of Science, Media and Democracy (EISMD) engaging citizens in five countries with the collaboration of Der Standard (Austria), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany), The Irish Times (Ireland), Il Sole 24Ore (Italy) and El Pais (Spain) a question was asked precisely to see if people were interested in science news. The results showed that most respondents felt that they were interested in receiving more information about the science behind their issues of interest. The campaign also revealed that most respondents did not feel that they had enough access to this information and that their preferred method for accessing this type of information was the traditional media.
- Graeme Taylor mentioned the role that industry has in strengthening their communication abilities and try address the trust deficiency that exists. Industry should not be afraid to engage in an open and fair debate about science.
- Sofie Vanthournout reminded everyone that science is also fun and that the public is more interested than we think. Society should go beyond a strictly utilitarian approach towards science. Ralph Dum stressed that citizens will appreciate science news once they see the
- fascinating aspects of science and understand that scientific evidence are crucial for policymaking.

How can the EU institutions foster better cooperation between the key stakeholders?

- For policy making it is not enough to have input from scientific, we need to involve all the stakeholders. Wolfgang Bartsch mentioned that the European Commission is communicating science through regular reporting as well as the publication of “success stories”, individual cases showing that research has met societal needs. In addition, H2020 subprogramme “Science with and for society” supports activities aimed at raising interest for science and innovation in society. Commissioner Moedas commitment for “Open Science” is an indicator of the relevance of this debate for the EU institutions
- The institutions should fight against negative feelings about technology and innovation in society. Graeme Taylor stressed that there is a generalised lack of trust on media, politics, industry, and technology.
- Sofie Vanthournout underlined that it is crucial to aim at transparency, defined as the possibility to find easily the information we need, and public engagement, meaning that each actor brings input into the public dialogue. This will allow for a shift within society from an innovation-risks perspective to an innovation-benefits one. Improving the acceptance of innovation will improve the innovation itself.

What kind of institutions and incentives are needed to support better Science Communication?

- Erika Widegren underlined the need to look at these challenges from a structural perspective. Today we are working with structures that were set-up after the second world war when the world looked very different. Globalisation, the new media and ubiquitous information has changed the rules of the game. What type of new institutions need to be put in place to address these changes?
- Paul Rübig welcomed the call for the setting-up of a European hub for science communication. A hub that can learn and collaborate with existing best practices across Europe, like the German Science Media Centre, Sense about Science and REsearch. He also mentioned that he has been promoting this idea and that there has just been the creation of the legal basis in the EP Committee for Budget for this.
- Erika Widegren and Christophe Leclercq pointed out that it will be important for any such structure to be aware of the different cultural approaches and conversations going on in Europe. The same issue might be addressed from completely different angles in different countries depending on the cultural perspective. Any European organisation must start from the national dialogue if it really wants to reach citizens across the continent.
- Volker Stollorz underlined his support for such initiatives stating that we need tools to protect the citizens from the dangers of accessing inaccurate or misleading news through the social media.
- Graeme Taylor also underlined the need to educate the young generation on how to find accurate scientific information.
- Christophe Leclercq from EurActiv mentioned the need to foster cross-border media cooperation in Europe and that science could be a perfect topic for that.

Exploring the indicators

K4I member JIIP provided indicators that are relevant to the topic, including:

- The proportion of people interested in science by country (from existing surveys);
- The number of science media hubs;
- The number of science journalists (especially those in top national press and television);
- The number of hits on science and on technology stories on web sites.

Background and introduction

“We live in a society exquisitely dependent on science and technology, in which hardly anyone knows anything about science and technology.” – Carl Sagan

In today’s world, where science and technology permeates our everyday life, it is becoming ever more important to ensure an effective and reliable science communication. In fact, Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Science, Research and Innovation has placed “citizen science” as one of his three top priorities.

However, in a world of 140 character media, and quick rebuttals, where the value of the truth is diminishing, science communication is becoming increasingly difficult. How can you explain complexity and uncertainty in today’s world of hash tags and fast media?

Events of the past months have brought this problem to the forefront and prompted Katharine Viner, Editor-in-chief of the Guardian, to write a long article in July on the diminishing value of the truth in today’s world. Social media has swallowed the news – threatening the funding of public interest reporting and ushering in an era when everyone has their own facts.

Whilst the causes of this shift in paradigm are many and complex, the consequences as serious and potentially devastating for how we see society develop in the coming years.

In this changing media reality, how can science and media work better together to change this trend? What is the role and responsibility of each actor? What kind of institutions and incentives are needed to support better science communication?

Notes drafted jointly by K4I secretariat and Erika Widegren

Annex – Attendees list

List of Attendees - 11 October 2016 K4I Forum Dinner Debate "Science Communication: The Value of Evidence in the Digital Age"			
Title	First Name	Last Name	Organisation
Mr	Karl	Agius	European Parliament
Ms	Lydia	Aguirre	Journalist
Ms	Esther	Agyeman-Budu	Cefic
Mr	Konstantinos	Aligiannis	EFN
Ms	Jacqueline	Allan	JIIP
Mr	Jean Charles	Bocquet	ECPA
Mr	Wolfgang	Burtscher	European Commission
Mr	Thierry	De L'Escaille	ELO
Mr	Paul	De Raeve	EFN
Mr	Jens	Degett	EUSJA
Mr	Ralph	Dum	European Commission
Ms	Verónica	Estruch Giner	ACIE
Ms	Véronique	Fraigneau	PlasticsEurope
Ms	Isabel	Gareis	Bayer
Prof	Cristina	Gutierrez-Cortines	ArsCivilis
Mr	Bernd	Halling	Bayer
Ms	Eveline	Herben	VBN
Mr	Robert	Judd	GERG
Ms	Eva	Kaili	European Parliament
Mr	Theodoros	Karapiperis	European Parliament
Mr	Gerasimos	Katsikogiannis	European Parliament
Mr	Tom	Keen	British Agriculture Bureau
Ms	Petra	Kostolaniova	EuropaBio
Mrs	Maren	Kuschnerus	Land Salzburg
Mr	Louis	Lapidaire	United Academics
Mr	Christophe	Leclercq	EurActiv
Mr	Paul	Leonard	BASF
Mr	Gaizka	Leonis	Basque Country
Prof	Egbert	Lox	Umicore
Ms	Laura	Mariosa	K4I
Ms	Carla	Mauricio	COST Association
Mr	Harald	Mauser	EFI
Mr	Daniel	Mediavilla	El Pais
Ms	Mélanie	Moxhet	EuropaBio
Ms	Jessica	O'Flynn	ECPA
Mrs	Charlotte	Pedersen Jacobsen	Aalborg University
Mr	Vincent	Pieterse	Pieterse.com
Mrs	Mafalda	Quintas	COST Association
Ms	Stefanie	Rieder	European Parliament
Mr	Clément	Robijns	EuropaBio
Mr	Paul	Rübig	European Parliament
Mr	Peter	Rübig	European Parliament

Ms	Marta	Serrano	EURIZON S.L
Mr	Stanislaw	Skoczek	European Parliament
Mrs	Celmira	Sousa	BASF
Mr	Volker	Stollorz	Science Media Center DE
Mr	Roland	Strauss	K4I
Mr	Graeme	Taylor	ECPA
Mr	Felix	Uedelhoven	Bayer
Mr	Vinicius	Valente	EUREC
Ms	Sofie	Vanthournout	Sense about Science EU
Ms	Erika	Widegren	REIsearch
Mr	Carlo	Wolny	Angel.me