

Re-thinking Science Communication: Take-away Ideas for Citizen Science Initiatives

The relationship between science and society is evolving. Public and private institutions aim to be close to citizens in order to increase legitimacy, accountability and good governance. In parallel, science-informed decisions are also gaining momentum in advanced democracies.

These changes affect the working practices of scientists, policy makers, science communicators, journalists, and other practitioners. Such changes also impact how citizens relate to science and science communication.

WHAT

Citizen Science

Citizen engagement in science is a reality. People are involved as volunteers in the scientific process, commonly in data collection, but also in other phases, such as quality assurance, data analysis and interpretation, problem definition and the dissemination of results. The critical purpose of any citizen science project is to contribute to scientific research, but also empower citizens creating a collaborative effort between scientists and their community. It also promotes science literacy and critical thinking for an informed society, increases trust in science and contributes to defeating the fake news.

HOW

NEWSERA and the #CitSciComm Labs

The #CitSciComm Labs are the core activity of the NEWSERA project, aimed at unveiling the potential of citizen science projects as a communication mechanism for science and technology. The #CitSciComm Labs, composed of science communicators and data journalists, representatives of citizen science projects and their quadruplex-helix stakeholders, work on co-designing innovative strategies to better communicate. Each Lab is named after the addressed stakeholder and has local groups in Italy, Spain and Portugal.



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Citizen and society at large



Academic Scientists



Public sector and Policy makers



Industries and SMEs



Data and science journalists

Industries and SMEs



STAKEHOLDER

Industry, private companies, which can be multi-national organisations as well as SMEs and Start-Ups.

Entrepreneurs, R&D, R&I.

The Challenges

Lack of trust

Private sector may be sometimes reluctant to share data with citizen science projects. In order to avoid this, citizen science should be part of the research and innovation ecosystem, and therefore, the private sector would also benefit from this practice in the short and long term.

Lack of mutual knowledge and understanding

Acknowledge citizen science as a key asset for the company's image and reputation. Find a common agenda (for instance, showing them the connection between agriculture, livestock and biodiversity).

Lack of common language

Find a common language between projects and private sector stakeholders.

For that purpose, it's important to facilitate communication channels and exchange interfaces among researchers, citizens and private sector stakeholders.

Lack of funding

Support research by providing funds from international research projects.



Take-Away Ideas

1. Involve industry and SMEs

Including the private sector in the entire process of the project's design can benefit the project in many aspects: new perspectives and research questions, funding opportunities, further outreach and many others.

Try to engage with the vision and mission of industries with a potential interest in your project.

Industries are also exploring better ways to engage with citizens: use that common objective to work together on joint initiatives.

2. Network with sister citizen science projects

Build up a social capital network to gain credibility and to ensure social impact.

Shape a service for the industry to create a win-win situation.

3. One size does not fit all

Identify the right industry. Industry is not a homogeneous category, not only because they may be different for their sectors but even because they might differ in size, scale of their business, ownership and so on. The same strategy could not be adapted for all.

4. Embrace new business models

Fight stereotypes. Convince the industry that Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) dimensions are important aspects of today's industry. Help industry to adopt "greener" and "more social" models.

Contribute to rethink organization culture and develop new talent at the interphase of science and society.

5. Your data is valuable. Be proactive

Call attention to the added value of the data generated by your citizen science project.

Show that data and citizen science can help them in multiple ways: (1) to improve their products/services/processes, (2) to improve their social and environmental capital, and (3) to change the background narratives.