NEWSERA
#CITSCI IS THE NEW #SCICOMM

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.

Citizen and society at large	Academic Scientists	Public sector and Policy makers	Industries and SMEs	Data and science journalists

Public sector and policy makers

STAKEHOLDER

Members of a government department, legislature, or other organization who are responsible for making rules at the local, regional, national, and european level. Officers and public sector officials who create ideas, plans, and policies carried out by a specific government.

The Challenges

Lack of awareness

Nowadays, it is clear that citizen science initiatives can be catalysts of innovation: their inputs can lead to more informed and accountable outcomes in the policy and science agendas. By merging both agendas, we can expand the evidence towards a citizen-based policy making.

The policy ecosystem is complex and dynamic

There is a need to adopt a flexible mindset, and concrete coordination through the appointment of a suitable organization structure at a horizontal level willing to involve as many ideologies as possible, so changes in governments will not affect citizen science initiatives and its communications.

There is also a need to build standardized communication messages and potential barriers and mitigation strategies to overcome issues quickly.

Lack of trust

Tensions are still evident between traditional lobby and the innovative way of bringing citizens at the forefront of policy-making in science. Nonetheless, from a citizens' perspective, calls for more openness and accountability in policy-making are a real issue, together with a profound interest and eagerness from legislators to better appeal to public opinions' and knowledge.

Lack of training

Promote specialized citizen science workshops among governmental policy makers at the European Union, state members, regions and local governments levels. Enhance better coordination among territorial levels of government in order to avoid overlaps and to extract mutual learning experiences.

Lack of funding

Find resources for policy agenda and cost of participatory processes, and lobby for an increase in the budget for citizen science initiatives.

💡 Take-Away Ideas

1. Build alliances with policy makers

Engage the citizen science community to work together with the public administration at any level: from the local, regional, national, european or even international. Partner with policymakers in joint endeavours, and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Policymakers are also trying to find new ways to connect with citizens and improve administration popularity, and this is something that we all can take advantage of (mutual interest).

Do not think as a scientist! They are interested in solutions to their problems, not in scientific results or research questions.

2. Do your work

Understand which level local, regional, national or supranational and type of policy maker is of interest to the project. One of the main challenges at the EU or international level comes from the diversity of cultures and legislation. A previous research on how and whom a territory is governed is of utmost importance to better understand how citizen science projects can be integrated in the political sphere.

3. Timing

Connect to the policy agendas timings. It is also important to find the right moment to collaborate.

4. Support evidence-informed public policies

Check out if your citizen science project can address any issue in the political agenda to be useful for decision-making.

Co-create the research project with policy makers. Contribute with data and research outputs to more evidence-informed public policies. Create specific materials to policy makers that offer solutions to public issues based on your research.

Convey to government agencies and departments science-informed messages and recommendations based on your data.

5. Have a direct and concrete message

Adjust your message to a stakeholder which is usually extremely busy and solving urgent matters all the time. Have a clear idea of what you want to transmit before meeting them.

Simplify communication with usable products and maintain first "informal" conversations with technicians/policy makers available before presenting the project.

6. Team up with other organizations and let them see what you have in common

Coordinate across governance levels: Think globally, act locally. Work together with complementary citizen science projects. Make the case for citizen science as an innovative method to policies planning to help to give consistency to public policies.

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