

Cross-Cutting Activity (CCA) on Science Communication: Webinar explores effective codes of conduct and practices for European science communication

On 10 June 2021, an online CCA event was held, which included a webinar entitled 'Working towards a code of conduct for European science communication' and a Business meeting. The meeting, which was opened by Dr Ronald de Bruin, provided a welcome opportunity for COST to announce the extension that has now officially been granted to the CCA on science communication, postponing the end date of the network to 1 April 2022.

The event, which was chaired by Prof. David Budtz Pedersen (CCA leader), was organized with the aim to continue the activities of the network, to share experiences, and plan next steps, in particular the organization of the CCA final conference. A total of 37 CCA members attended the event, which marked the second time a CCA meeting was held in a digital format.

The first part of the event focused on the webinar which featured presentations by 8 CCA members from different geographical, sectoral and disciplinary backgrounds. The variety of the webinar contributions meant that the topic was addressed from many different angles, covering valuable perspectives.

Prof. Alexander Gerber from the Institute for Science and Innovation Communication, set the scene of the webinar. Highlighting key functions of codes of communication, Prof. Gerber stressed that "measures of capacity-building, monitoring, and sanctioning are often missing in codes of conduct, which limits their effectiveness".

Ms Cissi Askwall, representing Vetenskap & Allmänhet, expressed the view that "having a code of conduct is not the most pressing issue, but there is an urgent need to change structures to create a better climate for researchers to communicate their research: this is what the CCA should aspire to contribute to". Prof. David Budtz Pedersen agreed that a "code of conduct is a small but important part of the science communication ecosystem, which needs to integrate incentives, rewards, thereby creating a supportive environment for researchers to communicate their science".

In lack of an agreed code of practice in use at a national level in Ireland, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) developed its own code of practice, emphasising reliable and trustworthy communication targeted to a non-specialist audience. Mr Thomas Deane explained that the TCD code stresses the need to "underline wider implications without overselling the news, avoiding the sensational character of some press releases".

Covering the publisher's perspective, Ms Federica Rosetta explained Elsevier's priority of making sure that "what gets out in the public is correct information, peer-reviewed, timely and scientifically sound". With the aim to supporting young researchers, Elsevier has set up 'The Researcher Academy', focusing on helping the research community, and particularly researchers in their formative years, to gain confidence in disseminating research.

The European angle was presented by Ms Catherine Simoneau, representing the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). While the JRC does not have a code of conduct for science communication, it focuses on working principles for scientists in 'science for policy'. The JRC operates according to the key principle that "science communication always takes place in the 'evidence for policy' context". Given the fact that science communication is

centred within a competence framework of policy making, there is a need to improve researchers competences to increase the uptake of evidence in policy making, contributing to more evidence-informed policies.

In their joint presentation, Ms Elena Tibi and Ms Rebecca Winkels from 'Wissenschaft im Dialog', stressed the importance of defining the basis of values that good science PR should promote, with an emphasis on truthfulness as an essential element of science communication. Transparency, clarity, honesty are the leading principles for achieving better results.

The final webinar intervention, by Dr Izabela Warwas from the University of Lodz, underlined that in some countries, including Poland, science communication is a relatively new topic, the development of which is held back by the lack of a science communication code and a rather traditional understanding of the relationship with society.

The great mix of presentations and lively chat to which several CCA members actively contributed, demonstrated several shared concerns. Firstly, codes of conduct and practices, where they exist, are mostly being developed in isolation at national, regional or institutional level. A European perspective on what a code of conduct or practice for science communication should entail, is currently absent. Several CCA members agreed that the science communication ecosystem should be further developed in a holistic and realistic manner. This point relates to the issue that was highlighted in the context of codes of conduct being in need of a 'reality check'. Designed to address problems in science communication, in reality, codes of conduct are not always able to resolve problems or adequately address challenges. Ms Mhairi Stewart, from the University of St Andrews, commented that codes of conduct or practice need "proper investment to support institutional embedding of good practice in engagement. If culture change is the goal I think we need both positive and negative incentives to raise the activity up the agenda".

Finally, several CCA members expressed the need to ensure 'dialogue' in the practice of science communication. According to CCA member Mr Matthias Tang from the Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies, "neither science communication nor science itself is a one-way street. Not only does science change society, but society has an influence on science, and we need to consider that".

The webinar was followed by a business meeting, which had the overall purpose to kick off the process of planning the CCA final conference. To this end, an ad-hoc Working Group on the CCA final conference was created, whose members will work together, over the next months, to make the final conference a success.

In order to help prepare the work of the ad-hoc WG, break-out sessions gave CCA members the opportunity to share their ideas about potential topics for the final CCA conference, in the context of the overarching topic of how to develop impact in science communication.

The network will continue to explore next steps and new activities as the CCA on Science Communication moves forward.

Further reading

[CCA Science Communication web page](#)

[COST Cross-cutting Activity on Science Communication and EUSEA organise joint webinar on public engagement beyond COVID](#)

[CCA report 'Communicating Science in Times of COVID-19'](#)