Science Shops – Important Actors in Community Based Research

In addition to the demands made on research and development by commerce and industry, ‘civil society’ organisations have their own research needs. Within the concept of ‘social demand’ for knowledge there is an increasing necessity for communication from society to researchers. Science Shops are one type of interface between science and its researchers and society. Science Shops are organisations created as mediators between citizen groups (trade unions, pressure groups, non-profit organisations, social groups, environmentalists, consumers, residents association etc.) and research institutions (universities, independent research facilities).

A Science Shop provides independent participatory research support in response to concerns experienced by civil society.

The term ‘science’ is used in its broadest sense, incorporating social and human sciences, as well as natural, physical, engineering and technical sciences.

There is not one dominant organisational structure defining a Science Shop. How Science Shops are organised and operate is highly dependent on their context.

The above definition of a Science Shop might also include organisations that do not self-define as a Science Shop. Organisations that meet the definition of a Science Shop and do provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education on an affordable basis are invited to join the Living Knowledge network.

You can contact the International Science Shop Network, and its members, by sending an email to the International Science Shop Contact Point.

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European Contact Points

Non-European Contact Points

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Living Knowledge – Breaking out of local conditions

Science Shops and similar organisations in Community Based Research (CBR) in general are small and local entities, bound to local conditions. They are highly diverse in respect to organisational structure, focus and funding. A network allows for breaking out of the local. Facilitating collaboration and cooperation broadens the base of knowledge and experience. Living Knowledge focuses on strategic issues and is active within political settings.

International Networking

In 2007 the European Research Advisory Board advised researchers to take “societal questions and concerns more into account and to integrate engagement with societal actors into the university curriculum.” It also recommended to develop further mechanisms for societal actors to improve their research capacities, to encourage structures for partnerships between researchers and societal actors in research dialogue and to integrate societal actors into the various stages of research. The Living Knowledge Network offers a unique opportunity to exchange with some of the key thinkers and practitioners both from civil society partners and the academic and research community in the area of community based research, university-community partnerships and Science Shops.

Living Knowledge – Tools and Infrastructures

Participative formats have gained in importance internationally and created many opportunities for dialogue-oriented science. If we now intend to focus on innovation and guiding research it is required to re-imagine research relationships and see how knowledge co-creation can be advanced and how civil society can fully participate. There is an ongoing interest in and attention given to the participation of citizens in science-based policy processes and decision-making procedures. Consequently as a next step citizens and their organisations have to engage with research as equal partners and providers of knowledge and expertise. Here the Living Knowledge Network’s activities focus on different levels, ranging from strategic networking to training of individual skills and from information to mentoring of old and new Science Shop practitioners. A summer school focusing on new Science Shop initiatives is one of the offered tools. The network can also create opportunities for thematic research co-operations.

Discussion List, Online-Debates and Website

The Living Knowledge News and Discussion List keeps subscribers informed about developments related to “Building partnerships for public access to research” and the international network of Science Shops. It is an open and free internet mailing list. All subscribers can contribute at any time with any frequency. There is no moderator. A transnational web portal for debates focuses on questions connected to the European reflection on the ‘grand societal challenges’ for the future of the European Research Area - linking existing debate formats – such as science café’s, science festivals, online-forums - with the Science Shop network. The various debates (or dialogues) on science are actively used to articulate research request of civil society. These requests are forwarded to research institutes and results then are used in the next phase of the debate. Thus, these debates move ‘upstream’ into agenda settings.

The network website, www.livingknowledge.org, gives access to all tools of the network. It offers background information, news, and announcements about all kind of activities related to community based research, science and technology and science communication. It also gives access to reports and the archives.

Newsletter and Magazine

The electronically “Living Knowledge” newsletter carries information at regular intervals about issues relating to the various facets of Science Shop work. It is targeted to Science Shop staff, as well as to similar working organisations and scientists interested in community based research. This structural activity for the expanding network is complemented by the magazine “Living Knowledge - Journal of Community Based Research”. The magazine publishes a combination of news, reviews and discussion of Science Shop research methods, results and impacts.

Projects and Conferences

Local research themes might have an international dimension. The network can be used to link organisations all over the world that work on similar local research issues to initiate international research projects. Five international conferences, from 2001 in Leuven, Belgium, to Seville, Spain (2005), Paris, France (2007), Belfast, Northern Ireland (2009) and Bonn, Germany (2012) and several international cooperation projects have been indispensable milestones for the development of the Living Knowledge Network. Find out more about SCIPAS, TRAMS (Training and Mentoring of Science Shops) or PERARES (Public Engagement in Science and Research Engagement with Society) on the Living Knowledge website.