

## **Communities building Knowledge - Innovation through citizens science and university engagement**

### The 3<sup>rd</sup> Living knowledge conference

Organised by the International Network of Science Shops Network, Fondation Sciences Citoyennes (FSC), the International Network of Engineers and Scientists for global responsibility (INES), the Centre of Sociology of Innovation (CSI) and the Unit Political and Social Transformations related to Life Sciences of INRA (TSV).

### **Objectives**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> international Living knowledge conference will provide a forum where information on community based research, carried out in both community and academic settings, on new forms of partnerships between research and civil society and on new modes of innovation can be shared and developed. It aims at disseminating and exchanging information on community based and participatory research, on citizens' science and cooperative innovation. It will present the work of a whole range of structures and science-society interactions. This will include science shops, NGOs, universities and research institutions engaged with citizens, independent institutes, participatory action research centres, political bodies, and social movements - all responding to a growing demand for research coming from wider civil society. These groups undertake a comprehensive range of research topics, including research on local and global environment, health, safety, mobility, unemployment, poverty, minorities' issues, disability, research on voluntary action and social capital, and national and international development. They offer a broader perspective on what should be included in science and research.

The conference will address a number of key questions:

How does citizens' research work, what kinds of knowledge does it produce with what objectives and consequences?

How does citizens' research challenge traditional scientific frameworks and techno scientific paradigms ?

What new options does it open to scientists?

What innovative ways does it explore (non proprietary, cooperative, bottom-up forms of innovation and production of knowledge in society) ?

What visions of society does this research promote?

What are the social and policy contexts necessary to promote community based research activities?

Where stands Europe in this development?

The conference will lead to the presentation of a large variety of experiences from across Europe and beyond that will reflect the social utility and richness, the innovative power and the scientific value of these initiatives. It will discuss the current societal context in which science is increasingly contested and will

reflect on the conditions for a democratised research and socialised innovation.

The conference is aimed at attracting both people already active in or people interested in community based and participatory research - citizens, researchers, students, civil society organisations, administrative officers, policy makers, etc. Our intention is to build bridges between us, explore ideas, and discuss strategies in order to empower one another. The conference aims to share best practice amongst and link community based and participatory action research networks around the world.

## **Background to the conference**

Scientific and technical knowledge - including its embedding in modern technologies – involves many substantive social, political, economic and cultural transformations. It affects fundamental social and political structures throughout a society. Technical systems are political structures in the sense that they open and constrain the life choices and social structures which a society can give itself. Technologies crystallise social relations and make them last. And yet, technology policies often escape public scrutiny. The principal scientific and technological choices are influenced by market, researchers and bureaucrats and decisions are often made outside the operational framework of our democracies.

Scientific knowledge is not neutral nor are the conditions of its production. It is contested and negotiated knowledge that is increasingly influenced by economic factors and for which the economic and organisational resources are unequally distributed in the society. Moreover, a new form of social conflictuality centred on the questions of risk has arisen since society has been confronted with numerous unintended, the environmental and human life threatening consequences of scientific and technological innovations.

However, surveys and qualitative investigations have shown that it is not that much a discredit or a fear of science which dominates in the public sphere but rather there is a growing feeling of a dysfunction in public regulation of modes of innovation and economic development in general.

Today, public research policy, – if it is on a regional, national or international level, - relates *techno science* nearly exclusively with competitiveness, business, patents and economic strength. This is seen as the main and unquestionable way to achieve wealth and, well-being in society, problem-solving and the future development of science itself. Just like health, culture, education, and well other fields that are accounted as public and collective property, research yields appear to be thus increasingly linked to the requirements of financial markets. But technologies and competitiveness cannot compensate for the lack of just social and environmental policies and are not shaped to solve long lasting injustices in society. Therefore, to conceive public science policy in a solely industrial and commercial framework is unjust and incommensurate.

Technoscience obliges us to question the very basis sense of science, research and innovation. The changes that research has been undergoing during the two last decades have removed it radically from its initial missions (production of knowledge, preservation of independence) without challenging its current and

future mission. We are increasingly conscious that we live in a limited world, on a planet where the natural capital becomes a limiting factor. The needs of the most underprivileged, the concerns of social and environmental justice, solidarity, diversity, sustainability, human rights, alternative property schemes and the public request for knowledge to manage our world more wisely must thus be integrated with research and innovation.

Taking the example of universities it is clear that the currently ongoing process of university reorganisation places increasingly emphasis on hierarchical management rather than democratic governance principles, on stronger university-industry relations rather than university-community relations, and on more practical (business) orientated education programmes rather than on a broader societal approach to science. This development leaves few room to community and civil society orientated engagements, to debates with wider society, to reflections on the responsibility of science and on its impact on long term societal development. But to establish direct relations between universities and communities is important in order to build social capital and to open universities to society, as well on a local as on an international level. Universities could do so by opening theses, research projects and programmes to cooperations with non for profit civil society organisations, by linking these cooperations to university courses, by strengthening the open access movement of scientists, by supporting alternative innovation schemes (not only patents), etc.

What our experiences and analyses suggest is that

- The former consensus for simple “progress” has been replaced by a strong societal demand for precaution and for participation in the decision making on socio-technical issues.
- There is a growing awareness that scientific knowledge is crucial but has to be democratically oriented in public interest perspectives to face the challenges our societies and our planet are facing.
- Our knowledge society is a shared distributed knowledge society, characterised by a process of permanent and disseminated innovation, where society as a whole becomes a productive and creative place. Not to tap into and enhance new civil-society-based knowledge dynamics would be counter-productive to Europe’s aspiration towards a socially coherent knowledge-based society (rather than to a science-based economy, or economy-based society).
- Participatory research makes a *participatory approach* to learning as a central part of a research process. Research should not be done just to generate facts, but to develop understanding of oneself and one's context. It should be about understanding how to learn, which allows people to become self-sufficient learners and evaluate knowledge that others generate.
- Sharing of knowledge, resources and expertise between universities and organisations in the community is possible and enriches research, teaching methods and curricula in universities. It reinforces community decision-making and problem-solving capacity and enhances students' education and employability by means of diverse opportunities to build their knowledge, expertise and work skills through hands-on research and related experience.

- Numerous peer-to-peer cooperative innovation processes (Free Software, Wikipedia, Tela Botanica, farmes' seeds movement, etc.) are the latest examples that suggest that a *third sector of knowledge production and innovation* (beyond the state and market sectors) has strongly emerged within civil society. This sector (CSOs, users, "Pro-Ams"... ) will become a major feature of the science and technology policy landscape in the 21<sup>th</sup> century.
- This *third sector of knowledge production* explores alternative socio-technical futures and new directions for research. It goes beyond mainstream paradigms and frames which dominate public and private research institutions (e.g. the dogma of the harmlessness of low dose radiation, the reductionistic and productivist paradigm of agronomic research, genetic reductionism, patents as necessary incentives for innovation, etc). These forms of knowledge sometimes also differ from the classical scientific knowledge by their local character and relevance. They are built by and for concerned local groups (e.g. patients, peasants, local communities, users).
- The third sector of knowledge production creates knowledge according to a participatory mode where the division between experts and "laymen" (users of knowledge) leaves the place to a culture of collective intelligence, to dynamics of creative communities, to attention paid to differentiated demands and a relation of dialogue and co-production of knowledge.

However, many civil society organisations are still relatively uninvolved in research policy issues, even though they may spend a lot of their time addressing issues that are the result of research decisions made 20 years ago. We suggest that it is time for CSOs to move upstream and engage in dialogue with scientists and science policy decision makers. On the other hand, many scientists fearing the "unscientificness" of the outer world still hesitate to engage with civil society and citizens. But our knowledge-society needs the involvement and interest of CSOs in research and innovation and it needs researchers willing to work with them. This will further enrich research, broaden science's societal legitimacy, diversify socio-technical options according to specific contexts, increase environmental, social and economic well-being, democratise innovation and strengthen our democracy.

In knowledge-society Europe, citizenship is not just access to knowledge (as the science communication approach, which empowers the citizen only as a user of scientific knowledge); it also implies access to techno-scientific decision making processes and being empowered as a producer of knowledge. Since citizens come from the "other side" of the problems, and since they have different preoccupations from researchers, they are able to approach and to contextualise the problems in other way, they propose other normes of judgement, they want to know other things and they utilise another range of data. Since the consequences of research activities have such an important impact on daily life and on our democratic structures, science and research should be as much considered from the citizens' perspective as from that of the scientific establishment, the industry or governmental bodies.

The conference organisers wish to underline that a science for all must be built with all and include the dialogue with knowledge formerly devalued (such as that of patients, peasants, associations, laymen, indigenous peoples, etc).

Furthermore, the diversity of approaches in different countries is considerable, yet there has been relatively little information sharing and cross-national learning between countries, universities, public administrations, policy-makers, grass-roots associations and science shops.

Consequently the conference will focus on:

- Empowering of people and promoting of active citizenship
- Building equitable and supportive research partnerships with civil society organisations
- Developing concepts and tools for civil society research in order to contribute to the development of the research agendas and research methodologies at public research institutions like universities or research organisations
- Enhancing scientists' and researchers' capacity to work for and with citizens
- Facilitating transnational community based research themes by developing concepts and procedures for transnational community based research co-operation.
- Developing strategies and concepts to help civil society organisations and needs to influence Science & Technology policy agendas
- Gaining support for new modes of innovation to be designed and implemented and to legitimate them
- Developing scientists' and policy makers' awareness of public concern issues
- Supporting the development of new science shops and participatory research organisations