



‘SciComPt 2022’: stop, listen and act — reflect on the past to build the future

Reviewed Conference

10TH ANNUAL CONGRESS ON SCIENCE COMMUNICATION — SCICOMPT 2022, SÃO MIGUEL, AZORES, 11–13 MAY 2022

Reviewed by

Cristina Luís

Abstract

During the Covid-19 pandemic the world faced enormous challenges demanding immediate responses. As a result, public communication of science assumed unprecedented prominence. Now, we need to stop, listen and act. This was the motto of the 10th Annual Congress of Science Communication in Portugal — SciComPt 2022. The meeting provided participants with exactly that — an opportunity to reflect on the past and help build the future of science communication in Portugal.

Keywords

Community action; Public engagement with science and technology; Science communication in the developing world

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After two years of online meetings, as mandated by Covid-19, the 10th edition of the Annual Science Communication Congress in Portugal — SciComPt 2022 — was held in-person between 11 to 13 May 2022 (<https://scicom.pt/index.php/scicompt-2022/>). Close to 160 participants gathered on the beautiful island of São Miguel in the Azores (Figure 1). With the ocean nearby and surrounded by beautiful landscapes, the participants had the perfect setting to ‘stop, listen and act: reflect on the past to build the future’. This conference motto was decided by the Portuguese Network of Science and Technology Communication, the main organiser of this event.

The pre-event programme included five practical workshops linking science communication with journalism, comics, cybersecurity, graphic arts and data visualisation.

Day one of the congress had a focus on science journalism, with the hosting of a parallel event, the IV Iberian Encounter of Science Communication and Journalism. The discussions focused on changes in the professional contexts of science



Figure 1. Group photo at the 10th Annual Congress on Science Communication — SciComPt 2022 (image provided by SciComPt).

communicators and journalists over the last decade, the importance of listening to audiences and how these professions would need to adapt in future. Summaries of these discussions are available in Portuguese and Spanish at http://scicom.pt/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/IV-Encuentro-Iberico_conclusoes.pdf.

This opened the door to the first keynote by Frank Kupper, from VU Amsterdam in The Netherlands. We were transported through the experiences gained in the EU-funded RETHINK Project (<https://www.rethinkscicomm.eu/>) that tested the possibilities of improving the quality of science communication through open and reflexive interactions and interfaces between science and society. Kupper highlighted the potential of local collaborations, and involving participants from diverse backgrounds, to inform quality science communication and reflections in different contexts.

Rather than tell people what to do, science communicators should join existing societal conversations about science and support societal dialogues, and play a role to make these more meaningful and beneficial for all participants. This, Kupper said, was one of the main lessons from RETHINK. He added that effective relationships were one of the essential ingredients of open and reflexive conversations about science and that initiating and fostering these relationships should be a priority for science communicators. Further advice included becoming more comfortable with uncertainty and the limits of knowledge, and being receptive to new knowledge sources and perspectives.

Elizabeth Rasekoala, President of African Gong, the Pan-African Network for the Popularisation of Science and Technology and Science Communication (<http://www.africangong.org/>), delivered the second keynote. She commented on the difference it made that English was not the most widely spoken language amongst delegates and how that made people listen differently, with “a different kind of intense listening!”. She lauded the progress made in the advancement of women in science communication in Portuguese-speaking (Lusophone) regions, but lamented its failure to deliver across the intersections of gender and race —

with women and men of colour still largely ‘unseen and unheard’. Rasekoala highlighted the ongoing need to empower African citizens with scientific knowledge and how this needed to be initiated and led by African experts. She explained how African Gong’s flagship capacity-building programme — *Africa Scientifique: Leadership, Knowledge & Skills for Science Communication* — was trying to contribute to these goals in a way that would be transferable across different African linguistic contexts. She expressed concern about the low participation of Lusophone participants, which she attributed to the ongoing impact of a systemic lack of racial diversity, equity and inclusion in Lusophone regions, and the ‘deafening silence’ of its lack of engagement in the paradigm-shifting discourses on the decolonisation agenda. Finally, she stressed that there is still a need for more collaborative partnerships in research and science communication with African countries, but, emphasised on equitable processes of co-creation, co-design, co-engineering and co-ownership.

A wide variety of science communication topics were included in the presentations and debates that populated the rest of the program, including discussions around science communication strategies and tools, co-creation of knowledge and meaningful public engagement. Some of the hot topics that continued to emerge during discussions included the role of women in science communication, how to implement collaborative design in socially deprived neighbourhoods and the challenges of science communication in isolated regions. There was also a dedicated exhibition space that offered the possibility to display science communication activities taking place in Portugal.

Prior to the congress (during April and May 2022), SciComPt entered into an innovative partnership with a local weekly newspaper *Açoriano Oriental* to publish a set of opinion pieces on the importance of science communication. Covering topics ranging from social challenges to science journalism, it provided a way to include the citizens of the Azores islands.



Figure 2. Examples of opinion pieces related to science and science communication published in the newspaper *Açoriano Oriental* leading up to the SciComPt 2022 event (image provided by SciComPt).

In the closing session the President of SciComPt, Vera Novais, highlighted the challenging conditions in which the conference was organised. It was also announced that Bragança will be the city to host the SciComPt meeting in 2023!

Author

Cristina Luís has a Ph.D. in Biology and she is a researcher and lecturer at the Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon, in the areas of science communication, citizen science, public engagement, history of science, and history of horse domestication. She is also a member of CIUHCT — Interuniversity Center of History of Science and Technology. She has been highly involved in numerous actions related to public engagement in research and since 2010 has been involved and coordinating several citizen science projects and initiatives. Cristina coordinates the University of Lisbon's participation in the EU funded NEWSERA project that is exploring citizen science as a new paradigm for science communication. She conducted the first mapping of citizen science projects in Portugal, coordinated a survey on the Portuguese researcher's perceptions and is promoting the establishment of a Portuguese Citizen Science Network. She coordinates a research project that intends to document the history of citizen science in Portugal. She is chief-editor of HoST — Journal of History of Science and Technology.



cmluis@fc.ul.pt

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