

European Week of Regions and Cities workshop  
**Communicating Science #EngageAudience**

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**REPORT**  
**October 2020**

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## **Executive summary**

**Science communication (SC)** is an important challenge for scientific work in the regions. It increases the attractiveness of research and encourages the best scientists to conduct research at research institutions within the regions. SC is a crucial tool to boost internationalisation. It involves raising awareness of the Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe opportunities, including among external audiences, which helps to build a prestigious image of research institutions and attracts experts from abroad.

**Communicating Science #EngageAudience workshop** addressed the issue of science communication from different perspectives, including the role of open science. SC takes place at many levels (within scientific communities and outside to the public); during this workshop we focused on the popularisation of science, bringing it closer to society, for example to the man on the street, policy-makers and researchers. During the debate, we also mentioned different appeals and initiatives regarding COVID-19. Our speakers discussed not only examples of good practice but also the challenges they have been facing and potential solutions.

The workshop was organised by regional partnership **Regions for Open Science**<sup>1</sup> as part of the European Week of Regions and Cities 2020. Due to safety measures, it took place via Zoom. The recording is available [here](#). This report presents the key messages of our session, and we believe that you will find it useful. I would like to personally thank our speakers and partners for all their hard work and effort. I would also like to thank our participants for their interest in this extremely important and timely topic.



**Vendula Nováčková**

*Director and moderator*

*Representation of the South Moravian Region to the EU*



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<sup>1</sup> South Moravian Region, Wielkopolska Region, Region of Murcia, Region of Slavonia, Baranja and Srijem, City of Carini, City of Nicosia.

## **Partners**

**South Moravian Region (Czechia)** is located in the south-east of



the country on the borders with Austria and Slovakia. Its capital is Brno, the second largest city of the country, the centre of judiciary, university life, and Central European trade fair. The region is well known for its deep cultural and historical roots, folklore traditions and wine production. It is strategically located at the

crossroad of rail and road routes. The region has great economic potential. The number of businesses in computer technology, telecommunications, software development and other hi-tech fields has been increasing significantly. The region offers support to the development of technology and biotechnology incubators designed for new companies. It is home to several research & innovation centres, such as [CEITEC](#), [FNUSA-ICRC](#) or [JIC](#).

**Wielkopolska Region (Poland)** is one of the largest and fastest



developing regions in Poland. It is a competitive and innovative region with a low unemployment rate. Its capital city Poznań is located between two European capitals: Berlin and Warsaw. Poznań, the science and business centre, is home to one-third of companies based in the region. These businesses have an

excellent base that enables and supports their development: professional research facilities, availability of EU funding, infrastructure, and the Poznań International Fair (a leader in this industry in Poland). Poznań has also been the location of many important international events, such as the United Nations Climate Change Conference which took place in 2008.

## **Partners**

**Region of Murcia (Spain)** is located in the south-east of Spain.



Murcia is a Mediterranean region with export and entrepreneurial vocation. Its business environment is open, innovative, competitive. Murcia has a very advanced and modernised farming industry with important investments both in technology and applied research and development. The Research and Innovation Strategy for the

Intelligent Specialisation of the Region of Murcia (RIS3Mur) promotes an evolution towards a new growth structure based on research and innovation. Priorities are structured around activities in which leadership is clear, such as those linked to the agri-food value chain as well as the water cycle, environment, logistics and transport.

**Region of Slavonia, Baranja and Srijem (Croatia)** is one of



the four historical regions of Croatia. Taking up the east of the country, it roughly corresponds with five Croatian counties: Brod-Posavina, Osijek-Baranja, Požega-Slavonia, Virovitica-Podravina and Vukovar-Srijem. This region is located in the Pannonian Basin, largely bordered by the Danube, Drava and Sava rivers. In the

west, the region consists of the Sava and Drava valleys and the mountains surrounding the Požega Valley, and plains in the east. The region is rich in cultural heritage, continental tourism and golden cereal fields. The five counties perform jointly in Europe through their Representative Brussels Office.

## Partners

**Ri.MED Foundation (Italy)** was established as a public-private



international partnership between the Italian government, Region of Sicily, Italian National Research Council, University of Pittsburgh and its medical centre UPMC. The strategic integration with the clinical partner IRCCS ISMETT (a transplant centre of excellence and a reference hospital for the entire Mediterranean area) allows

them to develop truly translational research projects. The Biomedical Research and Biotechnology Center, which is currently being built, will employ hundreds of qualified people, attracting top researchers and physicians, developing strategic alliances, securing funds and investments for scientific research, and developing a considerable economic impact in the area.

**The Cyprus Institute (Cyprus)** is a world-class, non-profit research



and educational institution with a strong scientific and technological orientation. It is a regional Centre of Excellence, addressing issues of regional interest but of global significance, with an emphasis on cross-disciplinary research and international collaborations. The Cyprus Institute comprises of four highly specialised multidisciplinary

research centres, developed in partnership with leading international institutions in their respective thematic areas: 1) Energy, environment and water; 2) Climate and atmosphere; 3) Science and technology in archaeology and culture; 4) Computation-based science and technology.

## Speakers & key messages



### **Keynote speaker Signe Ratso**

Signe Ratso is the Deputy Director-General and member of the Management Board of the Directorate General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission. She is the Chief negotiator for Horizon Europe Association. She is also responsible for Open Innovation and for citizens' engagement in research and innovation policy and overall coordination of international cooperation.

### **Key messages:**

- European Commission issued its [Communication](#) on the revitalised European Research Area (ERA) on 30 September 2020;
- Engagement of citizens, local communities and civil society will be at the core of the new ERA to achieve greater impact and increased trust in science (addressing green and digital transition, promoting participatory actions, building expertise and networks across Europe);
- SC facilitates citizens' participation in research activities;
- The current pandemic highlighted the importance of SC;
- Horizon 2020 supports SC-related projects, e.g. [CONCISE](#);
- Horizon Europe will support further actions with Missions playing the main role – they require two-way communication that should be promoted by regions and cities;
- Communication needs to be place-based and relate to issues that citizens care about;
- European Commission and the Committee of the Regions work together on Knowledge Exchange Platform initiative;
- Link to [video](#) United against Coronavirus.

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## Iva Šašinková

## south moravian region

Iva works as a Science Communication Manager at Masaryk University in Brno, Czechia. Her role combines two key activities: 1) Developing a strategy to enhance the international competitiveness and to attract international researchers via implementing bilingual Czech and English Language Policy; 2) Promoting research and scientific knowledge towards different target groups, developing science communication strategy, leading workshops on science communication and research support.

### Key messages:

- SC is a bridge between the organised knowledge created within a university/research institution and the rest of the world;
- Why is SC needed? To increase impact, disseminate knowledge, cultivate society, strengthen public critical thinking, motivate young scientists, create an interesting brand for international cooperation, present your university as the best place for a scientific career, influence decision-making process, etc.;
- SC is often neglected or misused for a different purpose – goal is to:
  - bring attention to science communication,
  - make it a topic of interest and discussion,
  - put it into practice and improve it;
- Each target audience requires a different key message and a different communication medium;
- The current trend is a shift from traditional one-way communication (publishing in media) towards two-way communication (dialogue, active participation, e.g. science cafés).

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## Piotr Rzymiski



WIELKOPOLSKA  
REGION

Piotr works as a Researcher and Lecturer at Poznań University of Medical Sciences, Poland. He is a medical and environmental biologist with interest in microbiology, environmental health, human-environment interactions, and ecotoxicology. He co-authored more than 120 scientific publications, serves as an editor in peer-reviewed journals and expert of the Research Executive Agency. He actively promotes public understanding of science via blog articles, videos, commentaries, open lectures or workshops.

### Key messages:

- The university played a crucial role in combating the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland (established a testing facility, sent volunteers) but it also had to engage in communication with the public;
- SC is a crucial feature to ensure accurate responses to a health threat and public understanding of its nature;
- SC helps to prevent xenophobia and discrimination;
- COVID-19 received a tremendous scientific response which is very challenging to journalists – scientists have to make sure that science is communicated accurately and use all possible channels;
- Scientists and science are demanded during a crisis, e.g. videos of COVID-19 myths and facts has hundreds of thousands of views;
- Application [#FakeHunter](#): users can submit any information regarding COVID-19 they have found while scientists critically assess them;
- The public must understand the role of science in the modern world.

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## Encarna Guillén Navarro

Encarna is the Head of Medical Genetics, Chief Researcher and Professor at Virgen de la Arrixaca University Hospital, IMIB Biomedical Research Institute and University of Murcia, Spain. She always worked in the field of genetics and rare diseases and played a leading role in national and regional policy as the Health Regional Minister. She is also the President of the Spanish Association of Human Genetics. She actively promotes science via interdisciplinary meetings and media campaigns.

### Key messages:

- Science is the greatest collective endeavour that generates solutions for everyday life – science must respond to societal needs and global challenges, therefore, public understanding is essential;
- Governments need to make decisions based on quality scientific information;
- Governments and citizens must understand the language of science;
- Scientists must understand the problems that policy-makers face;
- IMIB works on 20 different [projects](#) related to coronavirus, e.g. STOP-Coronavirus responds to societal needs & improves SC with citizens;
- Good practices include: citizen engagement, networking (cooperation with Europe Direct Región de Murcia helps to connect with the public), fight against fake science, use of social media;
- There are many initiatives: [European Researchers' Night](#), [ADCMurcia](#), CIENZA dialogues with science from the Regional Library, Science in Hospital Classrooms (EAEHD), Annual Science and Technology Week by the [Seneca Foundation](#), the first [Scientific Divuligation Plan](#) of the University of Murcia, etc.

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## Nataša Drvenkar

Nataša is an Associate Professor and former Vice Dean for Business Cooperation, International Cooperation and Projects at J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia. She focuses on economic growth, development and regional policy. Nataša also initiated a successful project of student internships in five Slavonian counties. In 2019, she won the Croatian Woman of Influence Award. Her personal and professional mission is to empower, motivate and inspire students to achieve more.

### Key messages:

- European Union has opened new opportunities for development;
- Slavonian counties managed to increase their EU funding absorption capacity – local and regional transformation is ongoing. However, radical modernisation is necessary;
- Key factors that trigger regional growth are: importance of innovation and entrepreneurial thinking, accessibility of knowledge and skills;
- Their universities are not so much research-intensive yet;
- The region is facing a number of challenges: lack of businesses with growth potential, low participation in EU research programmes, its continental location is less attractive for Erasmus+ students;
- Where to improve: cooperation with businesses, internationalisation and collaboration at the university level;
- Actions should include the involvement of all main stakeholders, knowledge creation and knowledge transfer, encouraging students to do internships, etc.

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## Donata Sandri

Donata is a Communication and Marketing Officer at Ri.MED Foundation, Italy since 2014. In the past, she also worked for advertising agencies. She had the opportunity to participate in several projects focused on territorial animation through education and culture. Her work gives her the necessary knowledge to understand the key role of Biomedical Research and Biotechnology Centre that will be built in Carini for sustainable economic growth and social cohesion, especially in underdeveloped areas like Carini.

### Key messages:

- Ri.MED was able to attract highly qualified professionals to Sicily;
- They are currently building the BRBC (Biomedical Research and Biotechnology Centre) – together with a new hospital, the city of Carini will host the Mediterranean hub for healthcare and research;
- Such a hub has a significant socio-economic impact on the entire region – over time it can become one distinctive factor of the territory;
- Carini is classified as less-developed area but has been included in a Special Economic Zone which benefits from access to funding and subsidised tax regime attracting private investments;
- Involving citizens in changing the territory is critical – they are working on a public engagement program to involve citizens of all ages in scientific culture, which includes:
  - schools (lessons and workshops in local schools, guided visits),
  - public events (living labs, exhibitions, open lectures),
  - collaboration with the main players in the territory.

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## Fabio Maria Montagnino

Fabio is the Head of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at The Cyprus Institute. For the last twenty years, he has been promoting open innovation models through the generation of knowledge-based start-ups, technology scouting and knowledge transfer actions. The author of 3 patents has been involved in more than 30 R&I projects and established two incubators. He is considered among European leaders of innovation ecosystems by the EIT. His interest lies in the holistic combination of creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation towards sustainable development perspective.

### Key messages:

- The current crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic is a preparation for the upcoming climate crisis, but we do not know its real impact yet;
- Understanding complexity will be a priority both in science and our daily lives, but we are not ready for that;
- Our resilience approach should be fact-based, science-driven and collaborative;
- Open science can help to handle this complexity by:
  - raising awareness among citizens,
  - enabling crowdfunding of appropriate solutions,
  - being the engine of a new resilient and sustainable economy;
- Open science, open data and innovation are helping the companies;
- Examples of successful initiatives are: [NI4OS](#) (capacity building), [sCYence Fair](#) (citizens awareness), U-SOLVE project (impact making), [CaSToRC](#) (open HPC infrastructure).

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## **Conclusions**

Science communication brings the world of researchers and citizens together to address the societal, ecological, and economic challenges that Europe is currently facing. The COVID-19 outbreak is questioning the foundation of our lifestyle and economy. The entire world is facing an unprecedented level of uncertainty. Therefore, science is critical in times of crisis. Communication, interaction, and trust is now more important than ever, and all regional actors have a vital role to play.

Effective communication brings us better science. When scientists communicate more effectively, science thrives. The key step is to target the relevant audience and choose appropriate channels. Unfortunately, many universities or research centres still do not have separate SC departments that would support them in their efforts. Science must be communicated through social media – they have great potential. On the other hand, they are also the source of fake news and misinformation.

During the pandemic, research became something that people want to know and talk about, whereas before it was something very far and difficult to understand. There has been a shift from one-way communication to two-way communication at the EU level. We can see this in the new European Research Area and Horizon Europe Missions as well. Involving citizens, raising awareness, and making knowledge accessible is essential to popularise science on the ground and support the culture shift needed.