

Out of the Lab and into the Headlines

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Today scientists can't do their work locked up in their labs any more, but they have to communicate with the public in an active way. To increase the students' ability to deal with this challenge, this year's PhD annual meeting offered a workshop on the popularisation of science. The program included speakers from the field of communication as well as scientists talking about the experience they had made with the media. The wide range of inputs showed that the popularisation of science is not only a must but can be fun for scientists who involve in and boost their career as well.

The experience, scientist make with journalists, vary a lot and sometimes it is hard to predict which studies will be picked up by the media and which ones will be ignored. Generally, research that deals with society, health or human evolution has a higher chance to make it to the news, but it also depends a lot on the way it is communicated, as **Igor Chlebny**, the communications officer for the NCCR Plant Survival, explains. Therefore, it is worth it to invest a bit of time into figuring out how to convey scientific result to the interested public. Writing a press release in a few minutes doesn't pay, as **Christophe Praz** could tell from his own experience.

It is important to give the journalist a good story line, or he will find his own one, because telling stories is his profession, as **Prof. Redouan Bshary** put it. Often, the main story of a study is very different from the perspective of the audience than from the perspective of the scientific community. Therefore, the biologist recommends thinking about the one sentence that summarizes the whole study in a way that appeals to somebody who is not familiar with the topic and to find the thin line of skipping as many of the details as possible without corrupting the main story.

One third of the students attending the meeting indicated that they already have had contact with the media, when asked by **Oliver Dessibourg**. The Chief of the Science and Environment section of Le Temps predicts that everybody who follows a scientific career will be of interest for journalist at one point. To help the young scientists to learn communicating with them concisely, he brought a presentation full of examples for good or bad coverage of scientific topics in the media. Collaboration between science and media is complex but can be very exciting for both parties, as he told from his rich experience as a science journalist. However, it is important to mind the pitfalls. He also prompts the young scientists to ask journalists what they will use their informations and statements for and to make agreements on the conditions.

When communication through classical media is already challenging and full of opportunities, social media puts it on a whole new level. **Prof. Katarina Stanoevska-Slabeva** talks about her research on and experience in the role of social media in communication and cooperation for science. She sees a big opportunity in social media, not only to communicate results but also to increase the cooperation between scientists and to involve non-scientists in it, as well. Her talk starts a lively discussion between the students about the question whether social media will change the way research is done and how resulting problems of intellectual property could be addressed.

However, communication cannot be learned just by listening to talks. Therefore the PhD meeting gave the students the opportunity to practice popularising their research in the form of posters and talks, rewarding the best presentations with prizes.

The first price for the posters went to **Nathalie Veyrat**, who put her research in a cartoon, showing how she managed to shed light on the fight between plants, insects who want to feed on them and natural enemies of the herbivorous insects who help the plants.

The second price went to **Vincent Trunz** who with his poster disproved the common perception that the interaction between flowers and bees is full of harmony and mutual benefits. In fact, bees often serve themselves with large amounts of pollen without doing much for its dispersal while some plants produce toxic substances in their pollen to inhibit this theft of pollen.

The price for the best presentation was given to **Elvira de Lange** for her talk about everyday sorrows of caterpillars who feed on maize plants: Finding enough yummy food without becoming food for parasitic wasps, themselves.

Remarkably, all the prices went to students, who investigate the interaction between plants and insects. Maybe this is because communication matters there as well.