

Making PCST conferences as inclusive and diverse as possible

Report of demonstration session #788

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Outline of demonstration session

Currently, inclusion and diversity, also referred to as equity in academic literature, are hot topics, be it in terms of social inclusion, accessibility of education, or gender equality. So it stands to reason, as organizers of the next PCST conference in Rotterdam in 2022, that we have inclusion and diversity high on the agenda. It is therefore promoted by a special team, consisting of Anne Dijkstra, University of Twente; Pedro Russo, University of Leiden; Cees Leeuwis, Wageningen University; and Liesbeth de Bakker, Utrecht University. In Aberdeen we would like to devote an online session to new ways of promoting equity in our own PCST conferences. And we are asking for the conference visitors' help, especially those under-represented groups in our PCST family, such as the socio-culturally marginal voices from both global south and north, science journalists, policy makers, and/or certain groups of scholars. We are hoping the virtual nature of Aberdeen will already bring many new ideas to the table.

To kick-start this process, the session will start with four inspirational short pitches by four knowledgeable representatives from areas of the world or fields of professions that are not (so) well represented in the PCST community. They will share their ideas and expertise and finish with a suggestion to increase I&D at PCST conferences. After that, we will move to Network Spatial "3 Parallel Sessions Break Out" and join one of the 4 discussion tables. Each of the tables will have a speaker and a facilitator who will make notes of the important points made during the conversation. In a plenary 20 minute wrap up, all new ideas will be presented. Let's transform our PCST conferences of the future into more inclusive and diverse gatherings!

Our 4 speakers:

Karina Lupetti,

Connected to the Federal University of Sao Carlos in Brazil. She's much involved with the Olhares project which includes blind, visually impaired people from city communities, and undergraduate and graduate students. She wants to focus on more accessibility of PCST conferences for handicapped delegates.

Kim Waddilove,

Science Communication Lead for the Sub-Saharan African Network for TB/HIV Research Excellence (SANTHE). SANTHE works towards developing world-class scientific leaders in the whole of Africa. She wants to represent the global south: Asia and Africa. Her organization has set up guidelines for more Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and she would like to discuss how these guidelines could be used in the PCST conference context

Mohamed Elsonbaty Ramadan,

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Is an award-winning science journalist and science communicator from Egypt. He is the co-founder of Arab Forum of Science Media and Communication and the founder of Arab Science-Media Hub. He wants to discuss how to connect local and regional science communication initiatives to PCST activities in order to bring about more inclusion and diversity

Esha Shah,

She holds the position of Scholarly Teacher with the Department of Environmental Sciences at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. In 2018, she published (by Routledge) *Who is the Scientist-Subject? Affective History of the Gene* in which she looks at the way scientists subjectivity shape their objective science in the century long history of the genetic science. Her take on increasing I&D at PCST conferences is to make science communication stories more diverse, to break with just the hope & hype stories.

Notes of the conversations with the speakers in Network Spatial

Table Karina Lupetti (notes by Pedro Russo – 0 delegates)

- Work with the local migrant communities (e.g.: Portuguese: Cape Verdean community in Rotterdam) and connect through music (already presented in PCST NZ) <http://www.ufscar.br/ouroboros/>
- Visually Impaired: Add sign language & for some of the keynotes / audio description for some talks and potentially audio description for shows, demonstrations and performances . Guides and some tactile floor for guidance.

Table Kim Waddilove (notes by Anne Dijkstra – 0 delegates)

Ideas mentioned:

- Attract funding (PCST is very expensive) - e.g. Wellcome trust
- Favourable registration rates
- Advertisements to attract Asian and African participants
- Conference partly online
- Sessions (satellite conferences) in more countries at PCST Rotterdam time
- Organise another workshop before or after the PCST event which also shares costs
- Are there guidelines for diversity and inclusion at the PCST network?
- Set up projects which include visits, e.g. reserve money for visits in bigger projects?
- Young mother support - Pay the caretaker or enable bringing your baby & Child care facility during the conference
- Ask Dutch delegates to take someone in your house - possibility (for those in and around Rotterdam)

Table Mohamed Elsonbaty Ramadan (notes by Liesbeth de Bakker + 3 delegates: Heba, Mohamed & Marina)

- Organise a meeting bringing local and regional initiatives together with PCST info and input AND vice versa. Set up partnerships.
- Problem is registration fees, so bursary scheme is essential, it brought the 3 delegates here today, so enlarge scheme if possible.
- Spreading word about PCST is essential - many have not heard about it.
- If you do it virtually: registration is easier, more affordable.
- Attractive different (kinds of) speakers - social media heroes make it attractive to more professionals. In Arab world sci com is not an academic thing.
- Work out the idea of a satellite conference, hosted by a delegate present in Rotterdam, connecting with the professionals back home.

Table Esha Shah (notes by Sikke Jansma University of Twente (NL) – 0 delegates)

From the (gene) scientist the stories that are being told are mostly heroic stories about hype and hope. We should have more complex stories. Nature of the gene is very complex. We don't even

know what we don't know. We talk about public involvement, but we need to make the stories that come out from the scientist' point of view also inclusive. They should share their stories in multiple ways with various perspectives included. They should be more transparent.

What is the role of media?

- Media are looking for complex stories. In the beginning they are going along with scientists in this one-sided picture. But they are also looking for complexities. → For instance, the whole stories about junk DNA, this was a story that media brought out → the one sided rhetoric is the hallmark genetically modified science;
- Immortality ideology: tremendous need for turning the human race into super human → unconscious philosophical desire, rather than the misleading effort;
- What about public support and political support? CRISPR verdict from the EU that it is gene editing. Many scientists were not amused with this verdict, because that would mean that any product that they are producing would have to go through strict regulations → political economy of research funding is an important factor for the one-sided story;

What should we do at PCST?

- We should create an environment in which the one-sided stories are questioned. We should not only focus on how the public understands science or how the public can be engaged, but we should focus on scientists' motives. We don't do that enough. They are just regarded as the 'sender', the noble stakeholder with simple motives. We need to put them under the microscope.
- We need to study scientists to see how they communicate to policymakers and the general public → the motives need to be more explicit → far greater dialogue.
- Scientists make choices, and we need to study and discuss their underlying motives, philosophical heuristics, meta-physical worldview at PCST;
- We should study and discuss this in the context of the overarching system, but there is already quite some attention to the systemic issues. However, much less to the scientific motives. We also should understand how the scientific trajectories are being made → that also needs to be questioned. That is not entirely a systemic question.
- One idea is to invite scientists, who do not have a connection to Science Communication, to PCST.

Take home messages coming out of the final plenary discussion of this session:

- Make sure we don't forget about delegates with a handicap (physical, visually impaired, deaf).
- Not only invite 'others' to PCST but PCST should go out to 'others' as well (so Karina, Mohamed. Kim and Esha, let's keep in touch and see if we can organise PCST 'presence' at your own events);
- Let's see if we can effectively use the blessings of digitalisation, by organising a hybrid conference, or set up satellite conferences at PCST 2023 time.
- Arrange extra activities around PCST 2023 times: seminars on education / diversity & inclusion / sci com skills and practices
- PCST2023 conference: stick to DEI criteria!
- Invest in setting up partnerships that keep the work going throughout the years, instead of hopping from conference to conference (Esha: maybe set up an international working group that will focus on more diverse science stories)
- Look for extra funds / bursaries / reduced fees for digital attendance