Event summary

The discussion was moderated by **Cathrine Torp**, EVP Communications at the Research Council of Norway and EACD lead country coordinator for the EACD in Norway.

Mike Schaefer, Professor of Science Communication at IKMZ, University of Zurich, Switzerland, highlighted 5 big trends in science communication in the current climate:

- There has been an **increasing engagement from scientists and scientific organizations in the public debate**. However, there is still a lack of incentives and active disincentives for scientists to communicate in the public domain. Scientists often experience a lack of support in difficult discourses.
- **Tectonic shift in science communication**- including a crisis of journalism (resource cuts, fewer resources to deal with more information, which has negative impacts on quality). We are also seeing a pluralization of voices. A professionalization of science communication from organizations but also an increase in dissenting voices.
- **Individualization, fragmentation and polarization of audiences**. Over a quarter of the public can be categorized as 'sciencephiles' yet over one in ten are passively informed and 'disengaged'.
- **Online & social media and algorithmic curation** has had an impact on the scientific discourse for good and bad.
- The **pandemic** has accentuated these trends and highlighted challenges including what the World Health Organization labels an 'infodemic', the spread of misinformation and problematic information (also coming from political leaders and celebrity) and a peak of conspiracy thinking. Other trends include an increasing workload of science communicators, the crowding out of other topics such as climate change and a narrower focus of the debate on selected scientific fields.

Mike Schaefer presentation (PDF)

Cissi Askwall, President of the European Science Engagement Association outlined research findings about the confidence in scientists and journalists in Sweden and trends in Europe:

- There is an **increasing confidence in researchers** among the public between 2019 and 2020 in Sweden, Italy, Germany and many other European nations.

According to Cissi, the public's confidence in science is effected by:

- Process (how research is conducted)
- Product (research results),
- Person (the researcher)
- Presentation (how research is communicated)

The pandemic has led to an increase in the public's confidence in researchers (up 13%) while the confidence in journalists has decreased, with one in five stating they do not have confidence in journalists.

Cissi also mentioned that people with a higher education tend to have more confidence in research compared with those with less education.

Cissi Askwall presentation (PDF)

Anne Steenstrup-Duch, Communication Director at Sintef (and EACD Norway co-lead), echoed the evidence that trust in science is currently high and showed data that this has risen steadily throughout 2020. She stressed the point that science is about debate and that the meeting point between science and society is about critical discourse not about blindly trusting science.

Anne discussed three challenges in science communication and tips for addressing them:

- **Specialist journalists are become scarcer** and have less time and resources. They are transitioning from being gatekeepers to curators of stories.
- Make a clear **distinction between expert specialists and expert generalists**. Consider the context and don't oversell scientists.
- **Make yourself accessible**. Stop being too hung up on owning the narrative and don't try to control the stories too much. Trust scientists and journalists to do their job.
- **Make source material available**. Peer reviewed articles, scientific blog connected to peer reviewed articles. Transparency is key.
- **Fake news and disinformation**:
- Encourage critical reflection. The burden of proof is on the source of a statement.
- Claim your niche online, apply search engine optimization to make sure people find your peer reviewed articles and relevant content.
- Don't waste tie on the wrong target group
- **Communicating ambiguity**.
- At its core science is about **debate and critical view**, asking for a 100% clear answer of a scientist won't work.
- A uniform clear-cut message is not always possible.
- The pandemic has changed the game- it demands a global response and science communicators have an important role

"If people keep trusting scientists we have a manageable task in front of us." Anne said.

Anne Steenstrup-Duch presentation (PDF)

Cathrine Torp moderated a healthy debate with the audience covered topics such as deplatforming, the importance of pharma company scientists to act and communicate with benevolence and honesty to reinforce trust, the role of facts and figures versus the presentation of the scientists themselves and more.

Stay tuned for future EACD and #NORA partnership events including this upcoming event in April: **Trust and public debate in the age of Social Media and fake news.**