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## Improving Science Communication in Switzerland: Expert Group publishes Assessment Report and Recommendations

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Science communication and public engagement with science have repeatedly been called for in recent years – particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The expert group **“Communicating Sciences and Arts in Times of Digital Media”**, set up by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, has published the first comprehensive assessment **report** on science communication in Switzerland. It highlights positive aspects of the Swiss situation, like the strong public support for science and the wide range of formats that are available for science-society dialogue. But it also identifies challenges, like the insufficient support for researchers who communicate with the public, the erosion of science journalism, or the dissemination of dis- and misinformation on social media. On this basis, the expert group formulated 20 recommendations for improving science communication and public engagement in Switzerland.

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“The recommendations of our group are grounded in a thorough and comprehensive review of the available research on science communication in Switzerland”, says Mike S. Schäfer, professor at the University of Zürich and speaker of the expert group. “They stress, for example, that science communication should become an accepted part of science and valorized accordingly. They also underline that science communication should not be one-way communication, but dialogical, and that scientists should try to understand the perspectives of the public.” In addition, the group’s recommendations say that communication between science and politics should become more regular, that science journalism needs to be strengthened, and that more research into science communication is necessary.

### **In general, the report describes the Swiss situation positively.**

“Studies show, for example, that the Swiss population perceives science positively and that trust in science is widespread”, posits L. Suzanne Suggs, professor of Social Marketing at the Università della Svizzera italiana and expert group co-speaker. “Many scientists in our country think that science communication is important, and they are willing to engage with the public.” Gian-Andri Casutt, Head of Communications at the ETH board and also co-speaker of the group, adds: “The report also demonstrates that scientific and higher education organizations have intensified their public communication efforts, and that a broad range of science communication formats are available to the public – from museums and science centers over news and social media to science cafes and public lectures.”

### **But the report also highlights necessary improvements.**

“Research demonstrates that a small but notable part of the Swiss population is disengaged from science”, says Schäfer, “and we should not be satisfied with that”. The report also demonstrates that many scientists refrain from public communication because they lack training and do not feel supported by the scientific system, especially in crisis situations. It emphasizes that Swiss science journalism is facing significant challenges, and that many science journalists work under challenging conditions. And it shows that digital platforms have become important sources of information about science, especially for younger people, but that they can facilitate mis- and disinformation.

**Method:** The expert group report is based on a comprehensive review of the available interdisciplinary scholarship analyzing science communication and public engagement with science in Switzerland. Selectively, the report also incorporates original data, international findings, and secondary analyses where little or no

published scholarly work was available. A first draft of the report was externally evaluated via pre-publication public review of preprint chapters on the “Open Science Framework” repository. A second draft of the report was sent out for pre-publication peer review to four internationally renowned scholars with expertise in science communication and public engagement who are familiar with the Swiss situation.

**Composition of the expert group:** The group consists of 16 experts representing different scientific disciplines, different academic and scientific organizations and all linguistic regions of Switzerland. It includes social scientists researching science communication, computer scientists, scientists from publicly visible disciplines like climate science as well as professional science communicators and science journalists.

**Further Information:**

Expert Group Report: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4974312>

Website: [go.swiss-academies.ch/sciencecommunication](http://go.swiss-academies.ch/sciencecommunication)

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