

PhD-research as a marker of science communication's development

PhD-research is important in many scientific domains as it represents early development of new ideas and methods. So what does a 15-year record of science communication PhD-theses (2000-2015, N=164) tell us about the development of ideas and methods in this field? PhD-research, as represented in the projects on which we have gathered information, analyses the real world of science communication from many angles, e.g. scientists, the role of the media, museums, engagement, and generally in a descriptive, sometimes experiential, manner. The dominant form of research explains and understands the reality of science communication through surveys, observations and interviews. This leads us to the idea that PhD-theses tend to be 'phenomenological' and developments in PhD-research follow and explicate developments in science communication practice. This does not mean that the PhD-research bridges the gap between theory and practice, since systematically testing new insights in practice is missing.

This panel session will start by explaining the phenomenological character of PhD-research in science communication. We will connect this record to other trend studies on science communication research (e.g. bibliographical). We will propose a 'topographical research activity' map of science communication that functions as a platform for discussion about scientific developments in science communication. The map is not intended to set a research agenda, but to make it easier for researchers, practitioners and students to reflect on developments and boundary issues.

A qualified PhD-researcher and science communication educator who has been studying trends in PhD theses (MvdS), a communication professional who is pursuing PhD research (CA), a PhD supervisor and research leader who is editor-in-chief of a science communication journal (EW), and a science communication researcher who has co-edited an anthology proposing a view of the best in science communication studies over five decades (BT) will consider the issues arising from these observations and analyses.

