

Visionary or Fantasy? Creating open spaces for science communication and social inclusion.

EUCU.NET/SiS Catalyst Conference
Vienna, 10.-12. September 2014 ([SiS Catalyst project meeting 9.-10. September](#))

In recent years, universities and other science organisations have made manifold attempts to open up spaces which used to be limited to particular circle of people and for restricted purposes only. In return these re-defined areas of scientific engagement allowed for new encounters, which would otherwise not have been possible.

New temporarily or permanent environments are created for and with science organisations to engage with the general public – and a very specific audience than their customary target group became relevant: children and young people.

Children's Universities and similar programs have already proven as successful models in many aspects, even though the driving motivation behind them is quite diverse. The manifold types and characteristics of the Children's University models, as well as of similar science in society (SiS) interventions, may be based on the attempt to raise awareness for the concerns of science and research in general, or on science education. Or they may aim to promote study programs in STEM fields because of a decline in enrollment or a supposed demand on the labor market – and to impact on educational aspirations. They may also be driven by the motivation to show societal responsibility predominately or as a means to present universities in a new light.

Notwithstanding their individual objectives, Children's Universities have been discussed as potential change models for the education system. Based on their inherent principles, Children's Universities can be capable of influencing informed decisions about science in general and about continuing education and careers in science and research in the longer run.

As baseline value there seems to be a growing common understanding that such SiS initiatives must be accessible for all society members to have sustainable effect and not just include preferred groups.

The Vienna conference will be the last in a serial of four conferences that have been organized within the [FP7 SiS Catalyst](#) project framework. We will take the opportunity to share some of the outcomes and carry the idea further for the future. Over four years, SiS Catalyst has been working on making children visible as a relevant target audience for outreach and science engagement at Higher Education establishments and other science organisations – and to work on the impact which this endeavor can have on strategies, self-understanding and the "third mission" of universities.



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As a consequence an increasing number of SiS organisers has started to develop even more specific programs for special audiences, or tried to address a wider range of participants with existing offers – and made this an overriding aim.

But how do we interact with those who are actually participating? Who are the ones addressed by such programs in practice and what do organisers need to know about the social environment around them? What is their impact in this endeavor and how is this relating to the current concepts and definitions of "inclusion" and "minority"? Moreover, we will also consider ethical and organisational implications: When we open up spaces and enable non-traditional audiences to get a foot in the door, how can SiS organisers help to keep those rooms open – literally, over time and also in the strategic thinking? In the long run, how can the concept of "inclusion" and the engagement with children and young people contribute to a transformation of science intuitions, so that providing first insights over the fence will not be frustrated by reality of life.

During the pre-conference SiS Catalyst day on the 10.09.2014 participants will have the possibilities to learn more about the project and to share the experience and outcomes. The option for the participation at the SiS Catalyst Open House Day on Wednesday the 10th September is part of the [online conference registration](#).



