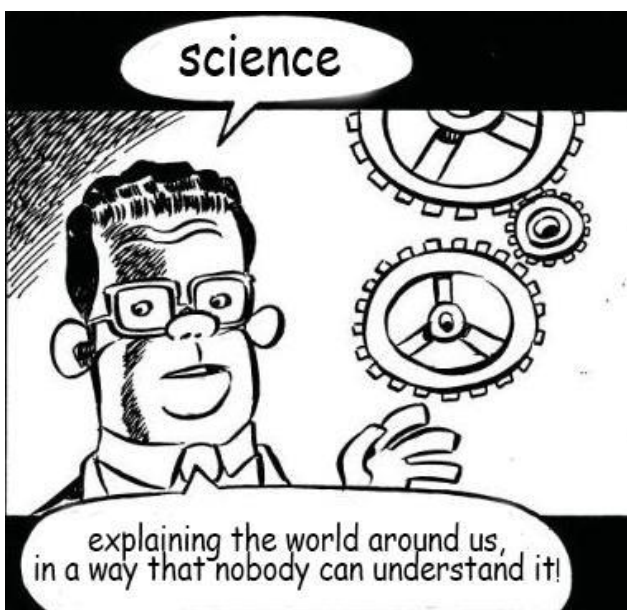


Comics&Science: scientific research becomes accessible through laughter

External good practice, COSV



Short description of method



Comics&Science is a project by a communication agency, Simmaceo Communications and the Italian National Center of Research, CNR created to promote the relations between science and entertainment. The idea behind moves on the idea that both are important educational moments for the growth of individuals and citizens and together they can reach a wider audience. Comic writers, researchers, mathematicians, astronomers and research hubs work together to develop short stories to introduce general public to topics such as the theory of relativity or the perception of time. The project started in 2013 with the first edition of a

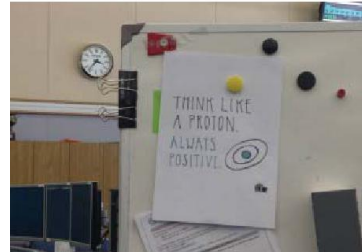
comic book on scientific issues, with the collaboration of the mathematician Cedric Villani, and has then participated to comics and science festivals. For the following two years, the initiative has been able to produce other 2 short stories on Time and Relativity. The communication is mainly managed through social networks and seen the response to the audience the team is working on going digital with a blog.

Comics & Science targets a generic public, aiming to attract the attention on science through education technics. Many scientists consider themselves “nerds” and are fans of comics and a section of the scientific community aims at showing the fun part of their work and the non-extraordinary daily life that characterize their work. This to make them closer to people, usually imaging them in a continuous “creative life”.

The format, today only in Italian, can be transferred to any level, especially for the international dimension of the scientific research and even more possible when they will be ready with the digital blog.

Digital methods of good practice

Comics&Science is not purely digital, it reaches the community through a digital communication but the publications are today available only off-line. Going digital would notably improve the impact, and that's why the team is going in this direction. It is important though not to lose the “real life” dimension, with events and meeting with the public that enhance the encounter with the scientific community. This is crucial to make people even more at ease with complicate topics, such as the Relativity, and meet professionals to overcome the feeling of being inadequate facing science.



Pedagogic/methodological aspects of good practice

The activity raises from the encounter of a comic writer and a pool of scientists who work of the publication. The comic writer has only a basic knowledge of the scientific content to be explored and it passes a good amount of time with the scientific team to understand the topic. He/she develops then a storytelling on the issue, introducing technical aspects and explaining the theory, but keeping an eye of the side aspects of the story. The personal life of the inventor, the impact on today life, and so on. The scientific team, in parallel, work on short papers that accompany the comic book to give extra specific information for those who are now interested in discovering more. Events are then organized to present the book and the theory and through social networks parts are published and the theories passed to general public.

Strength, weakness, opportunities and threads of good practice **A success story of the good practice**

Strength

The possibility to enlarge the access to technical topics, such as scientific theories, to a general public using a different language that ease the approach.

Weakness

The publications not yet online and only in Italian limit the access to an international community

Opportunities

Going online with a blog, as it's happening, will enlarge the people that can access the project but can also open the partnership to other researchers interested.

Threats

The involvement of the public is at the moment as recipients of the project and not actively involved in the production. This can lead to a lack of interest.

Which aspects are transferable?

Comics&Science brings together sectors apparently unconnected and creates a new language that manages to bring academics out of their comfort zone to meet the general public. This approach can easily be used by all specific subjects and could be even more implemented by a wider use of the digital. Aiming at overcoming the knowledge barrier that surround some fields, such as mathematics and science more in general, it can be a tool toward open knowledge.

COMICS & SCIENCE is an idea I had with Roberto Natalini, from the Institute for Applied Mathematics "Mauro Picone" of Rome. Roberto has worked for years an intense disclosure mathematics and having two teenage children comic fans, he could not ignore the existence of Lucca and its huge Comics Fair. We thought it could have been possible to convey science around comics, without betraying the sacred mission to entertain or sacrificing accuracy on the altar of simplification. We then began to focus on "Comics & Science": a format for presenting initiatives, products and entertainment. In our work there's a quality entertainment with scientific rigor, and that's receiving positive feedbacks from the scientific community and the general public. I think this is a great effort to communicate knowledge outside academia, otherwise scientific knowledge is essentially lost, locked in a language that not many people can understand.

What makes it a good method?

Comics&Science is not yet a full digital method, but it has all the requirements to enter the category once the team will be able to complete their web project. What is outstanding about this idea is the fact that a specific sector, science, usually perceived and auto-perceived as a close community engaging with "serious" and "though" topics, decides to open up to the general public and to do it renew its language. The approach behind it needs the encounter of communities, a comprehension of a society that changes and the need to be within the change to give a wider sense to a specific activity. When thinking about

digital and educational purposes, it's necessary to open up to innovation, to welcome changes and to develop new ways to interact with external communities.

Imagining Comics&Science going digital, the impact of this initiative can be much larger and international. It's a method that can be used in many other academic field, bringing knowledge to wider audiences... in a sort of way, it can be seen as a step toward open knowledge promoted by the scientific community. Digital is right behind the corner, especially thinking about the relation between comics and animation!

