



Interview with Norbert Steinhaus, Bonn Science Shop and Coordinator of the International Science Shop Contact Point on the Living Knowledge Conference, to be held from 10-12 May in Bonn, Germany.

*1. Mr. Steinhaus, as host of this year's Living Knowledge Conference you are expecting many international guests. Is there a regional focus or has the vision of a dialogue between science and society by now achieved worldwide acceptance?*

The concept of Science Shops, of community-based dialogue as well as independent and participation-oriented research, has by now grown greatly in size and influence and become visible worldwide: In 7 European countries (Germany included), Australia, Israel, South Korea and Malaysia new Science Shops have sprung up. US-scientists have formed a Community Based Research Network (CRN). And on a global level the Living Knowledge Network, a grouping of Science Shops and other institutions working on a similar basis worldwide, has joined together with a large number of other groups and networks of community-based research, and with GACER, the Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research, and has created a platform for global dialogue.

*2. Participation und science transfer are big words. Do they remain an abstract ideal or are actual projects and initiatives implemented?*

Over the last few years a participative format has gained in importance internationally and created many opportunities for dialogue-oriented science: scientists, students, and citizens can discuss socially relevant subjects and questions together and work out problem solutions. Scientists bring their factual knowledge and expertise to the table, citizens their questions and problems, but also their views, expectations, value orientation, and their specific state of knowledge.

I think that the presentations and workshops of the coming Living Knowledge Conference here in Bonn - but also the documentation of earlier conferences - prove that theory and big words do indeed lag behind the practice and the actual projects.

*3. The basic idea of a dialogue between citizens and science is - after all - not necessarily a German invention. Do we have to catch up here?*

Yes, indeed. Perhaps not particularly with regard to dialogue, but certainly with regard to participation-oriented science. Until now, Germany's universities did not seem to have room for this type of social engagement, certainly not during periods of school-like Bachelor and Masters degree courses, and whilst the public sector does not consciously promote and demand such an opening at the universities. In the meantime, though, even the universities are beginning to move. In the competition "More than Research and Teaching" (in German: 'Mehr als Forschung und Lehre') in early 2011 the *Mercator Foundation* and the *Stifterverband* gave awards to six universities and their concepts for social engagement. Two of the award-winning universities, Essen-Duisburg and Friedrichshafen, will also submit a presentation at the Living Knowledge Conference. In total, 78 universities had taken part in the competition.

The current expert opinion by the *German Advisory Council on Global Change* also states explicitly that social participation in the formulation of research questions, in the research processes as well as in the discussions of results constitutes success factors of central importance for the transformation to a sustainable, climate-compatible society. Over and above this, transformation-relevant education/learning geared to participation is indispensable for society's active participation in the transformation process.

There is also some movement on the political level. The Baden-Württemberg Science Minister, Theresia Bauer, stressed that Baden-Württemberg's science policy aimed at changes in research, teaching, and administration of the institutions, and that cooperation with civil society factors was also of decisive importance here. And North Rhine Westphalia's Science Minister, Svenja Schulze, recently emphasized during the inaugural event for the Year of Science 2012 in Berlin, that we need science to leave the traditional paths and define new aims and directions.

#### 4. This Conference is made possible by the financial support of the EU Commission. What are the interests the Commission actually pursues with this?

To explain why the EU Commission espouses the cause of community-based science would surely go far beyond the remit of this interview. Perhaps I should say just this: Science is part of almost every aspect of our lives, but sometimes the connection between community and science, or scientific progress, seems to break. The EU is making an attempt here to create a dialogue of mutual respect and trust, but also to inspire the next generation of scientists. Since the year 2000 the EU has been promoting numerous international projects in the field of 'Science and/in Society'. Science shops with their unique focus on participation-oriented research were a model from the very beginning which the Commission considered worthy of

imitation. The current Conference is therefore made possible within the framework of the PERARES Project in the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme.

## 5. Conference themes and contents come from the entire spectrum of science. For which actors is this Conference particularly attractive?

Against the background of dialogue and participation not only serving the public but also science itself - and here in particular the inter-disciplinary and relatively young fields of research - scientists at the Living Knowledge Conference will be able to learn from the 'outreach' experiences of their colleagues; especially because research sponsorship increasingly stipulates an element of communication as being obligatory. But it would also be good for nongovernmental organizations and civil society groups to 'take a leaf out of the book' of the over 70 practical examples presented and to see how their research requirements could be integrated into university structures. And students wishing to include socially relevant practical elements into their training/education could take suggestions back to their respective institutes. I am hoping for a very lively participation.