

Science in the Swiss Public: The State of Science Communication & Public Engagement with Science in Switzerland

Results from the Expert Group
“Communicating Sciences and Arts in Times of Digital Media”

About the Expert Group

Funding

A+ Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences

Speakers

Prof. Dr. Mike S. Schäfer, U Zurich

Gian-Andri Casutt, ETH Board

Prof. Dr. L. Suzanne Suggs, USI

Members

Prof. Dr. Karl Aberer, EPFL

Dr. Philipp Burkard, Science et Cité

Dr. Ana Godinho, CERN

Prof. Dr. Caspar Hirschi, U St. Gallen

Dr. Angelika Jacobs, U Basle / SASJ

Prof. Dr. Otfried Jarren, U Zurich

Prof. Dr. Alain Kaufmann, U Lausanne

Runtime

September 2019 – July 2021

Prof. Dr. Reto Knutti, ETH Zurich

Prof. Dr. Michaela Maier, U Koblenz

Prof. Dr. Julia Metag, U Münster

Thomas Müller, SRF

Prof. Dr. Bruno Strasser, U Genève

Prof. Dr. Albert Weichselbraun, HTW Chur

Expert Group Mandate

Rationale

- overall importance of science and public science communication
- fundamental changes in media ecosystem – and resulting chances and challenges
- no comprehensive assessment of scicomm/public engagement in CH yet
- academies as an ideal place for such an assessment and reflection

Mandate and Method

1. assess status quo of public science communication / public engagement with science in CH → *status quo report*

- review of available scholarship
- primary and secondary data analyses
- pre-publication public review
- national & international peer review
- discussion in EG, with external experts

Expert Group Mandate

Rationale

- overall importance of science and public science communication
- fundamental changes in media ecosystem – and resulting chances and challenges
- no comprehensive assessment of scicomm/public engagement in CH yet
- academies as an ideal place for such an assessment and reflection

Mandate and Method

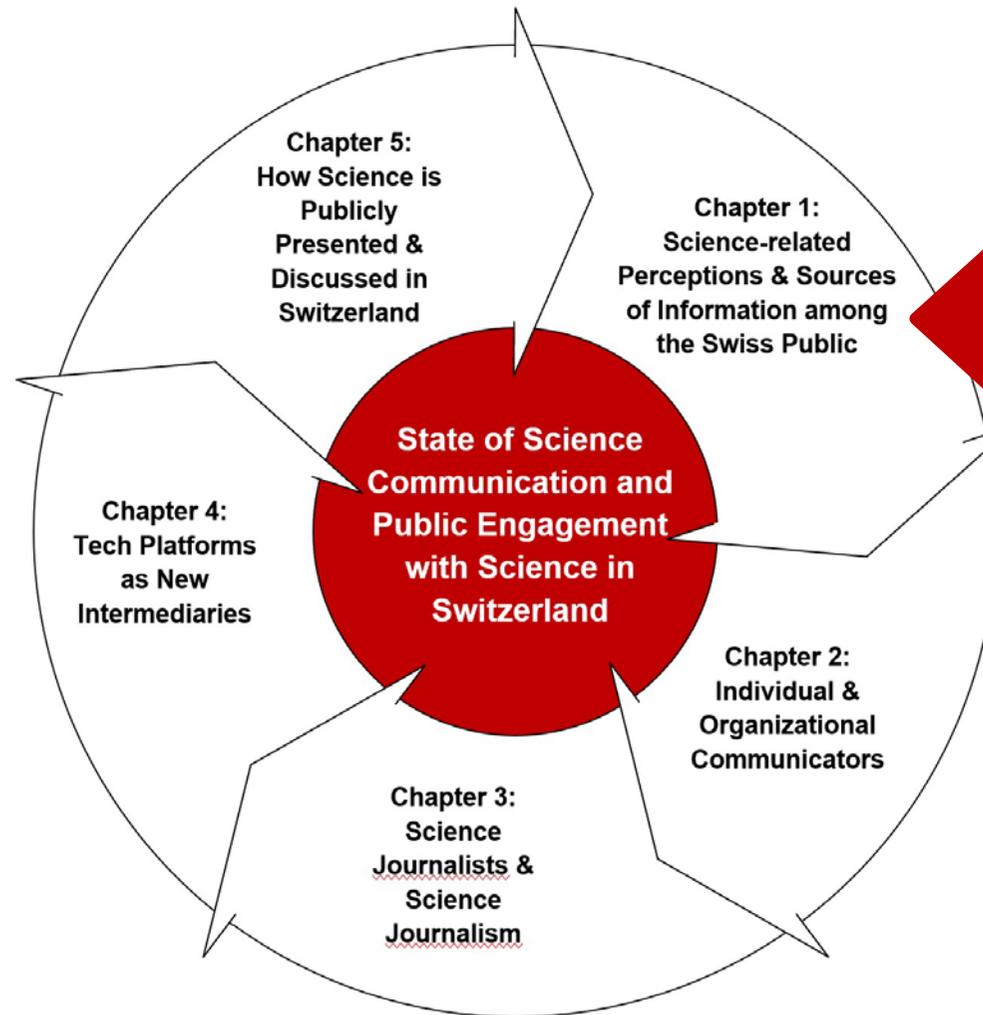
1. assess status quo of public science communication / public engagement with science in CH → <i>status quo report</i>	2. identify potential improvements & recommend how to realize those improvements → <i>recommendations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• review of available scholarship• primary and secondary data analyses• pre-publication public review• national & international peer review• discussion in EG, with external experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• identify core challenges via status quo report• discussion in EG, with external experts• stakeholder interviews and events• workshops like this one

Status Quo Report: Overview



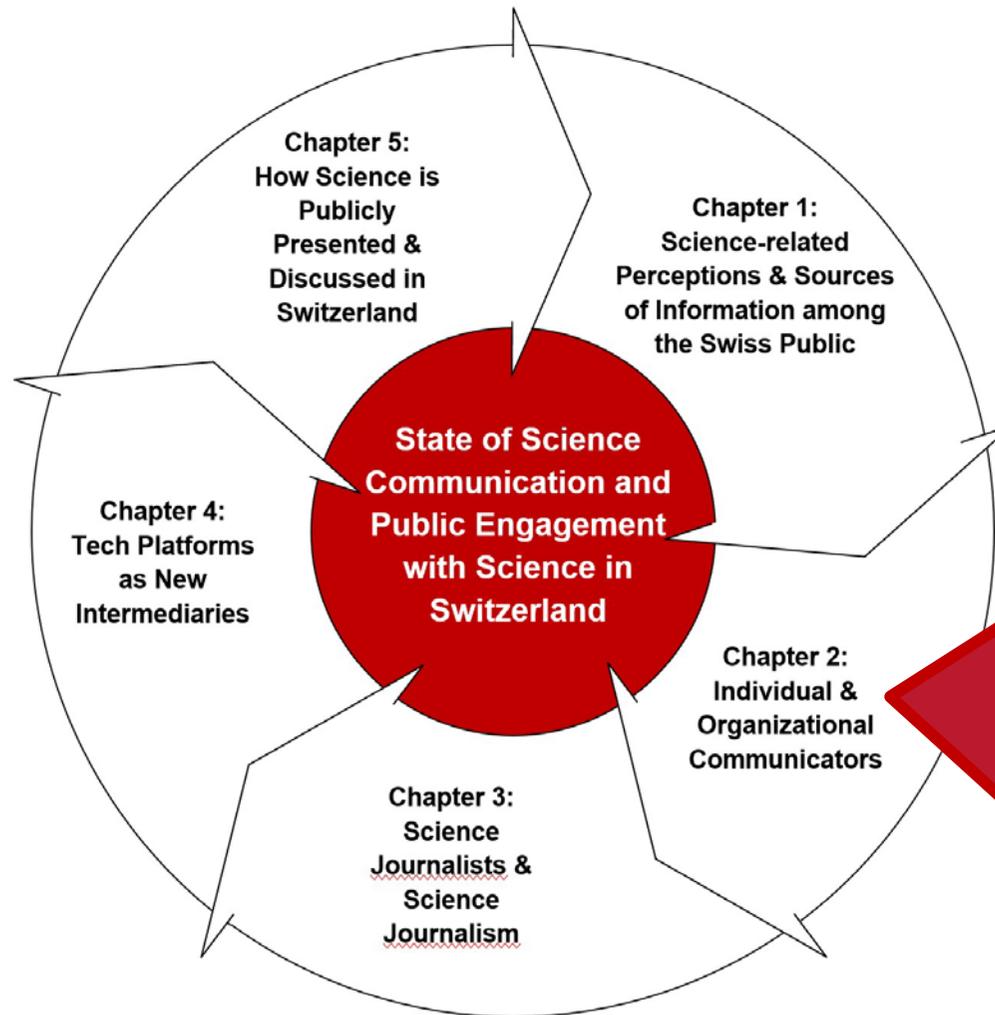
Not much research on many of these questions, even though data are often available. Many gaps in the respective scholarship. Almost no systematic monitoring, almost no trend analyses.

Status Quo Report: Core Findings



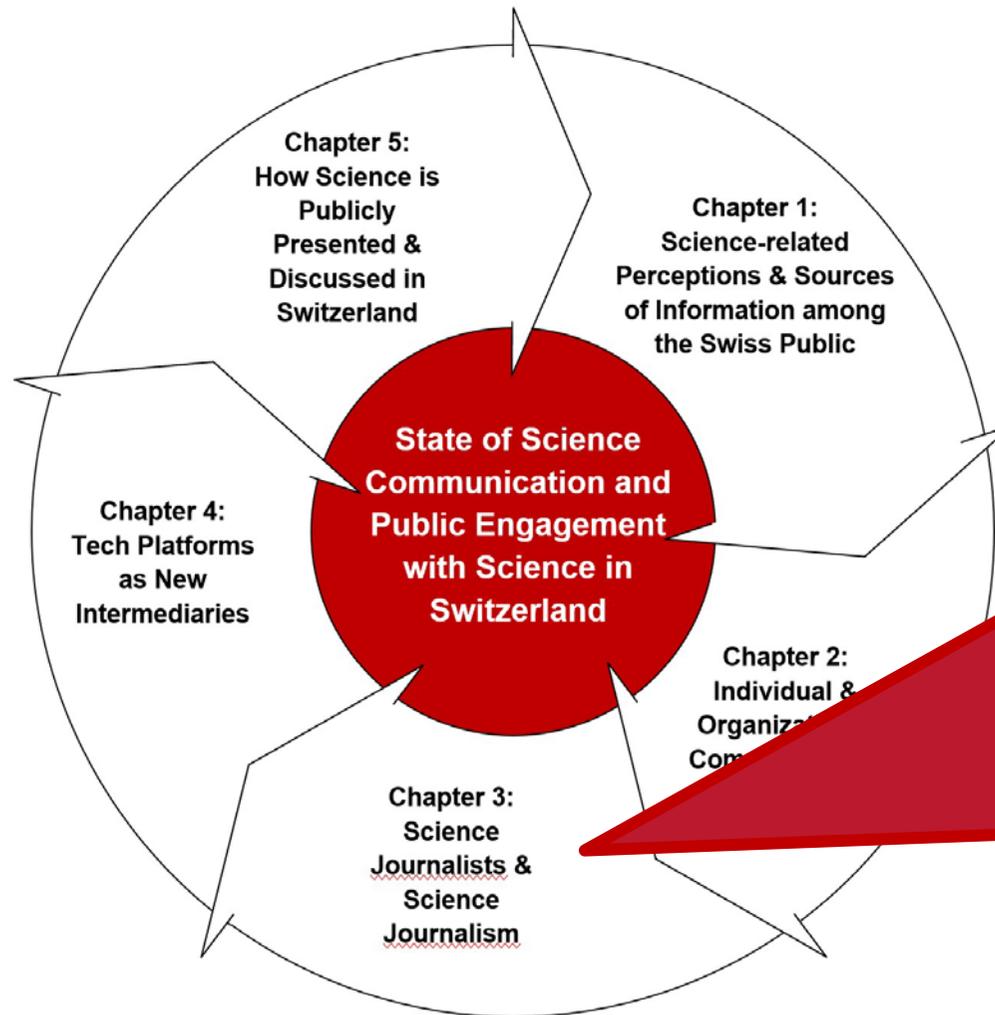
- positive perceptions of science, high trust, good scientific literacy
- perceptions vary between topics & subgroups of the population
- population expects science to communicate to public (also during COVID & on political decisions)
- science content often encountered online, but journalism (including online) still important
- overall positive evaluations of science journalism as well

Status Quo Report: Core Findings



- many scientists in CH open to scicomm, but considerably fewer do it
- differences along disciplines, seniority, gender
- social & organizational factors influence scicomm efforts; lack of support
- growing emphasis on public communication within higher education institutions & scientific organizations
- professionalization & growth of science PR
- broad scicomm landscape beyond institutionalized science

Status Quo Report: Core Findings



- Science journalism in structural crisis
- specialized science journalism declining: about 100 specialized science journalists & only small number of science desks remaining
- working conditions worsening
- new models of science journalism have emerged in CH, aiming to balance editorial independence and high quality with economic sustainability
- international support infrastructures like Science Media Centers are used in CH as well

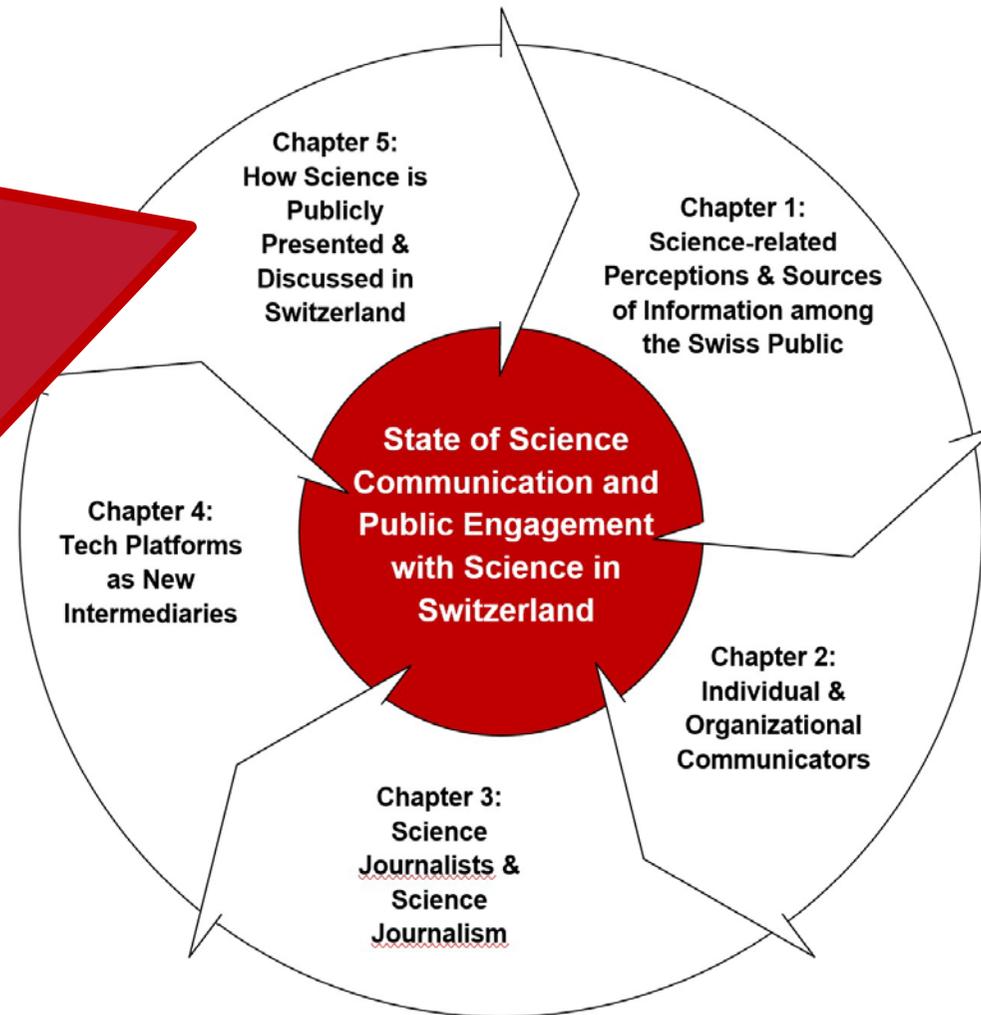
Status Quo Report: Overview

- large amount of scicomm available and sought after online
- digital platforms have become strongly used – but for many also less trusted – sources of info
- digital platforms (also) facilitate mis- and disinformation on scientific issues online
- platforms offer opportunities (see mobilization for FFF and March for Science), but also new challenges for scicomm



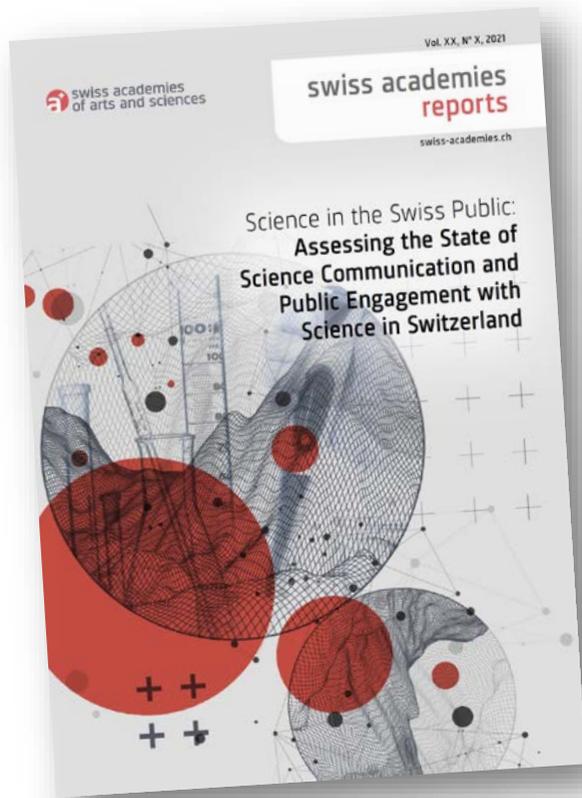
Status Quo Report: Overview

- considerable share of science-related media coverage
- most prominent disciplines pre-corona: social sciences; since: virology, epidemiology
- few individual scientists receive majority of media attention
- media reporting on science largely accurate, also during COVID-19 pandemic; but rising influence of PR
- very diverse quality of information online; including mis-/disinfo



From Status Quo Report to Recommendations

1. Status Quo Report



2. Recommendations

... based on report, workshops, expert interviews and specialized working groups within broader expert group

... address science communication broadly as well: including the role of individual scientists and institutional science communication, science journalism, institutional training and support, science-policy interfaces etc.

... represent consensus in EG

Recommendations

1 Science communication & public engagement should become an accepted part of scientific culture & practice.

2 Training in science communication and public engagement should be part of curricula, especially for young scientists.

3 Communicating scientists should be offered professional, social, psychological and, if necessary, legal support.

4 Improve scientists' understanding of public perceptions of science and the role of science in society.

5 Scientists & scientific organizations should understand and employ evidence-based scicomm.

6 A dialogue about aims and norms of science communication and public engagement is necessary.

7 Scientists and scientific org's should show how science works, including uncertainties, different perspectives, and relevance to society.

8 Encourage science communication and public engagement with underserved audiences.

Recommendations

9 Support participatory research initiatives.

11 Institutional science communication should be carried out and coordinated in-house.

13 Science communication needs to counteract mis- and disinformation.

14 Science communication and public engagement with science should consider and reflect the diversity of science.

10 Institutional and individual science communication should express the specific values of science, such as organized skepticism, methodological thinking and intellectual openness.

12 Research on scicomm in digital environments should be fostered through funding opportunities, data access and capacity building.

15 Communication between science and politics needs to be strengthened and institutionalized.

Recommendations

16 A new funding infrastructure for science journalism is needed, which should include a broad range of financial sources and fund innovative projects and core infrastructures.

17 Science journalism in public service broadcasting and established media houses should be strengthened, and networked across desks.

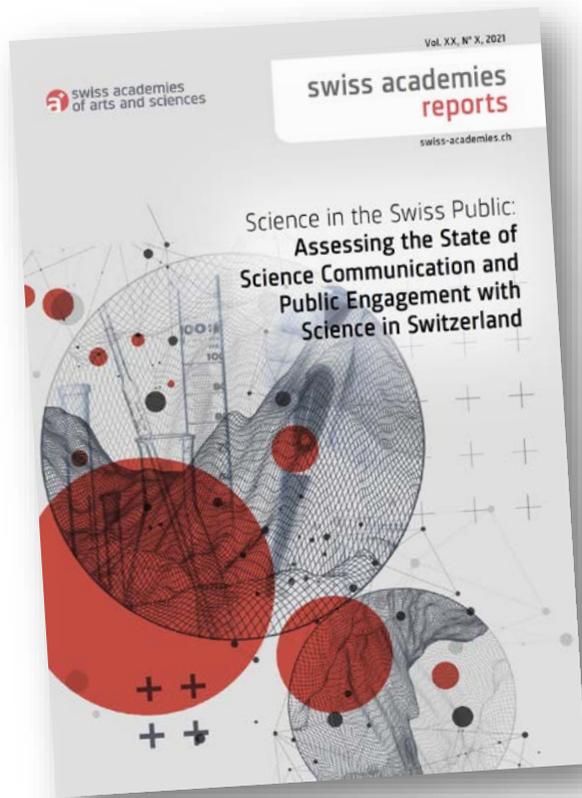
18 A national science news provider is needed to serve Swiss media houses.

19 Financially support and foster the independence of freelancers.

20 Innovation in science journalism in Switzerland should be furthered.

Your Questions?

1. Status Quo Report



2. Recommendations



Thank you for your attention!