



## Science popularization in Croatia – the real life story

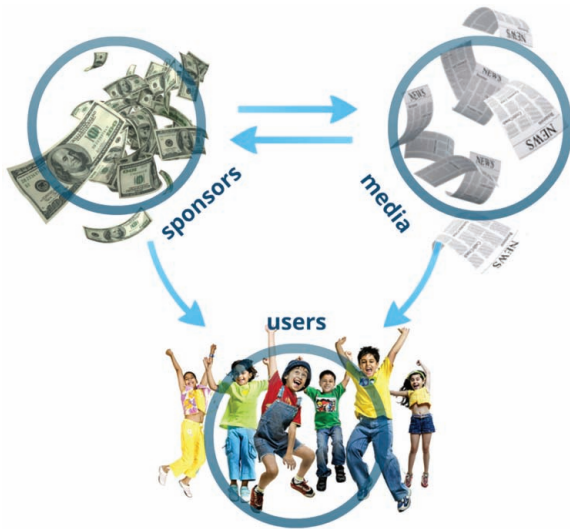
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I have been invited to a round table discussion on science popularization in Croatia to tell the story from the perspective of a young PhD student who, in his free time, together with hundreds of young enthusiasts in Croatia, is trying to promote science *pro bono*. Science popularization is a very broad term with two major goals which are either to make people interested in science or to make them fall in love with scientific research. Programs aimed at raising interest in science are usually short (one or a few days long), untargeted (visitors from "1 to 101" years old), have many users (a few thousand visitors) and cost a few Euros per program user. In Croatia, the examples of these programs are Science Festival, Science Picnic and Open Days of Ruđer Bošković Institute (and other institutions). However, to ignite the passion for scientific research in someone, one has to invest more time (a week or more). Such longer programs are usually targeted at primary or secondary school pupils and require individual approach (a small number of users) that costs much more – a few hundred Euros per user. Summer School of Science, Summer Science Factory and Summer Camp of Young Mathematicians are just some of these programs in Croatia. While the first group of programs is, at least on a certain level, organized by research or educational institutions, the second group of projects is almost exclusively organized by students who act like individual enthusiasts or non-profit organizations. My real life story comes from one of these organizations, Society for Out-of-Frame Education (EVO).

One of EVO's main projects is Summer School of Science, an international workshop for high school students interested in science and technology. Since 2001, when the first workshop was organized, we have had more than 250 participants and more than 120 mentors from 15 different countries. In Summer School of Science, students work in small groups of three or four on a single scientific project, guided by a mentor (usually an undergraduate or a graduate student or a postdoctoral research scientist). Projects are hands-on and cover different areas of natural sciences and technology. In ten days, we provide intensive work on high level projects, additional lectures and workshops, food, housing and 24h care. Although we all work *pro bono*, our program costs a few hundred Euros per participant and the biggest challenge is how to make it affordable for all users. From seven years of experience in this project, I can say that our main problem is a never-ending circle between sponsors, media and our users (Figure 1).

To attract sponsors, our program has to receive/get decent media coverage. On the other hand, you have to be "free of charge program" to ensure free media space. Even though we are all volunteers and our program is non-profit, we are very often treated as a commercial project. No press – no money. No money – no press. Since early 2011, when EVO was founded, thirteen of us have been writing project proposals



**Figure 1.** *The never-ending circle between sponsors, media and users. Our program has to be visible in the media to attract users and to get sponsorships which could make the program affordable to the end users.*

late in the evenings to raise the money and make the School affordable to the end users. During this period we sent three applications to international founders and won all three of them, which brought 83% of EVO's finances. We also sent eight national applications and won only one from a private company, which contributed

3% of EVO's budget. The rest of EVO's finances are from direct donations from our partners. These figures nicely illustrate the major problem of science popularization projects – lack of funding possibilities in Croatia.

We all apply to open calls for donations by big private or state-owned companies. These calls are untargeted and very broad, so our competitors are not other educational projects (like in international calls), but hospitals, sports clubs, cultural institutions, and all other NGOs you can think of. Naturally, the company will fund the project with the best ratio of press attention obtained and money invested. Buying a piece of equipment for children's hospital or sponsorship of a football tournament brings much better ratio than Summer School of Science. Until recently, the national budget was closed to these kinds of projects. The number and diversity of projects that applied to the first call by Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports for science popularization projects in the late 2012 surprised the Ministry, which promised to improve further calls and make them on-going. With government support we could pull more money from abroad (3% of national funding, and 0% from the government, for EVO doesn't look nice in international community) as well as get more media coverage if the project is officially listed as educational and non-commercial. Science popularization community in Croatia is getting bigger and bigger. We are ready for the expansion of our programs, but in that process we need to cut the never-ending circle between sponsors, media and users.