

## **Template for AG and Committee Annual/Semi-Annual Report (limit to 2 pages if possible)**

**AG/Committee Name: Science and Risk Communication - SCIRIC**

**Submitted by: Thomas-Benjamin Seiler**

**Date: 13.02.2018**

**Council/Board Liaison: Roel Evens**

### **Organization**

SCIRIC was established in May 2015, and is currently led by the founding steering committee, of which founding member Thomas-Benjamin Seiler is the chair. As agreed on in the charter the founding steering committee will serve a three-year term starting from the SETAC Europe annual meeting in Nantes, France, in May 2016, and after the initial three-year period, the committee will be revised to ensure a turnover of approximately one-third members per year.

SCIRIC has currently 2 working groups that work on the 2 pillars of the working programme. The PEOPLE WG creates a directory of science and risk communication expertise and experience within SETAC, establishes a network of those persons, and develops training on modern communication concepts. The TOPIC WG investigates the specificities of environmental sciences and SETAC research with regard to special requirements for science and risk communication, develops tailored communication tools and strategies for successful communication.

### **Activities Summary**

- We (re)presented SCIRIC at the SETAC Europe annual meeting in Brussels, Belgium, in May 2017. A SCIRIC poster in the AG area informed about the group. Slides were prepared for presentation at the SETAC booth. We also introduced the AG at the SETAC booth during the assigned time slot. The poster was a unique interactive poster with a small sticky dot survey that collected initial data on outreach activities by SETAC members, and raised awareness for the larger and more complete online survey (see annex). A Globe article on this poster and the ideas for interaction with the audience we tested by this is in the making.
- We launched an online survey on outreach activities of SETAC members, to find out how SETAC scientists communicate about their research, which resources they have and which they use, why they maybe do not communicate much or at all, what they would need to increase and improve their communication efforts, and what SCIRIC could do to help. The survey is still ongoing and is planned to be evaluated after the Rome meeting. A Globe article is planned to be produced on the results.
- A session on communication topics in the respective session track was proposed and chaired by Leonie Nüßer, Thomas-Benjamin Seiler and Jan Brandt of Cefas. A Globe article on this session is still in the making.
- Thomas-Benjamin Seiler presented a poster "Unbreak your science communication! Public relations in environmental sciences are a matter of skilful marketing", which took the ideas to categorise broken design by Seth Godin and transferred the categories to science and risk communication (see annex). A Globe article on this approach and the fruitful discussions at the poster is in the making.
- Thomas-Benjamin Seiler has taken over the lead of the Helpdesk Working Group, after Jose Julio Ortega stepped down due to lack of time. The next step of this WG is to send out a survey on what the SETAC membership thinks about the idea of a helpdesk, whether they would use it if it was offered, and how it could help them (if at all). This survey is currently being put together with the help of the SETAC offices, but work on it has been interrupted.

- Thomas-Benjamin Seiler became the SCIRIC liaison in the HHRA IG, and in return Brian Mulhearn joined SCIRIC to connect the two IGs.
- Thomas-Benjamin Seiler was appointed goal keeper for SETAC Europe's strategic goal 1 on quality and credibility of science, and leads himself the ad-hoc group on subgoal 1c, science-based risk communication. This goal will be worked on with strong support of the SCIRIC SC and membership.
- At the Rome meeting Annegaaik Leopold and Thomas-Benjamin Seiler together with Charmaine Ajao of ECHA will chair a special session on finding a shared understanding of hazard and risk among scientists and the implications for science and risk communication of differing scientific views of a certain topic. This is also meant to be the first symposium on science-based risk communication organized in the frame of strategic goal 1, subgoal 1c, by the science-based risk communication ad-hoc group.
- A science and risk communication symposium was proposed for the Sunday afternoon right before the Rome meeting starts. This symposium intends to use an Open Space-like approach and a World Café to collect ideas and opinions from the audience on the future work of SCIRIC. Based on the outcome the working programme will be concretized, aims and objectives will be revised, and the SCIRIC work in general will be further focused.
- For the SETAC Europe annual meeting 2018 in Rome, Italy, Thomas-Benjamin Seiler, Sike Bollmohr and Leonie Nüßer together with Samuel Thompson proposed a session out of SCIRIC, continuing the series of communication sessions since 2012.
- The working group PEOPLE continued work on the SETAC-wide network. It also got larger, after several SCIRIC members joined in Brussels.
- The working group TOPIC on understanding environmental sciences as a topic for communication started work under the lead of Agnieszka Hunka. There is already a review article on the state-of-art in preparation.
- Together with the SETAC NA Public Outreach Committee we had a session "What made you become a successful science communicator? – Tell us!" in Minneapolis. It was reported to have been a very entertaining poster corner on Thursday, also delivering the finding that Thursday spots can be highly beneficial esp. for poster corners, since people have little left to do.

### **Coordination with Other Advisory Groups and Committees**

Thomas-Benjamin Seiler is liaison to the SETAC NA Human Health Risk Assessment AG (HRAA). HRAA steering committee member Brian Mulhearn is liaison to SCIRIC.

Thomas is active member of the SETAC Europe Membership and Public Relations Committee and helped to organize the buddy programme at the Nantes meeting. He is also member of the SETAC Europe Long-range Planning Committee and leads the Helpdesk Working Group of SEC. Sarah Bowman is member of the SETAC NA Public Outreach Committee.

### **Future Plans**

Work in the WGs PEOPLE and TOPIC will go on. For the PEOPLE pillar we expect to have comprehensive directory of communication experience and expertise available end of the year. The survey will be thoroughly evaluated and results used to further shape SCIRIC work. Thomas-Benjamin Seiler is in charge of this development. For the TOPIC pillar a review on the diversity of outreach activities in the individual GUs and sectors is expected to be published as a starting point of the work. Leading person from the SC is Agnieszka Hunka.

### **Business and Planning Meetings**

SCIRIC met officially in Brussels during the SETAC Europe annual meeting 2017. Main topic of this meeting was the general low contribution to SCIRIC and other communication sessions, albeit clearly high interest in the topic.

## **Membership Communications**

Main channel for communication is the group mailing via the SCIRIC listserv, which is a major improvement over the group mailing feature of setac.org. Thomas-Benjamin Seiler more or less regularly writes on the blog, and sometimes distributes messages, e.g., to announce availability of meeting minutes. The steering committee is addressed through a local mailing list maintained by Thomas. It is intended to have in future a regular SCIRIC SC conference call. Communication with other bodies, such as HRAA, committees, happens via email and sometimes Skype conferences.

## **Issues/Problems**

The steering committee does not yet fully resemble the tripartite structure of SETAC.

## **Current Steering Committee**

### *Academia:*

Thomas-Benjamin Seiler – Chair	(2016-2019)
Agnieszka Hunka	(2016-2019)
Henner Hollert	(2016-2019)

### *Government*

Gerd Maack	(2016-2019)
Sarah Bowman	(2016-2019)

### *Business*

Pernille Thorbek	(2016-2019)
Silke Bollmohr (also NGO)	(2016-2019)

Roel Evens – Liaison

**No. active members:** 16

**Total membership (from Your Membership AG directory):** 96

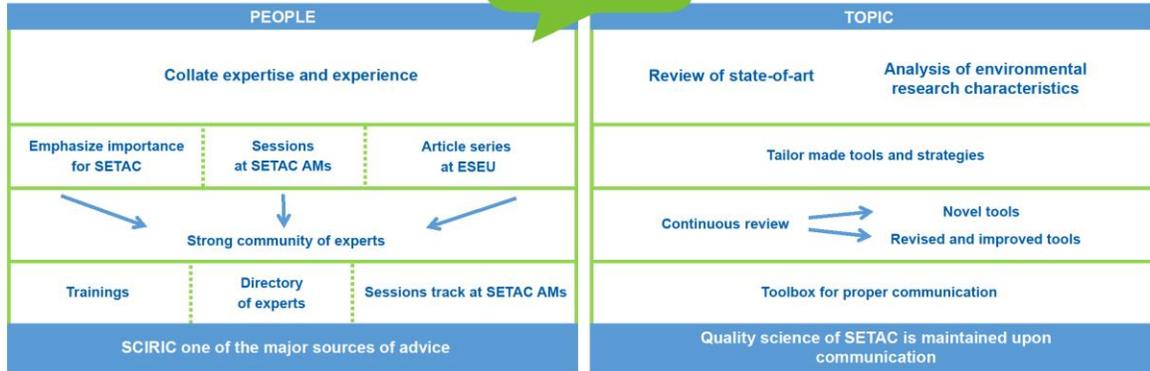


# Interest Group

## Science and Risk Communication - SCIRIC

We seek to become one of the major sources of advice on science and risk communication within SETAC and beyond

**SCIRIC**



How often are you communicating science and risk?



Does your institution regularly engage the public?



How could we help you to increase your communication activities?

Check out the extended survey on communication activities by SETAC members:

[www.surveymonkey.de/r/F655G9Z](http://www.surveymonkey.de/r/F655G9Z)



JOIN US!



# Unbreak your science communication! Public relations in environmental sciences are a matter of skilful marketing

## Thomas-Benjamin Seiler

Department of Ecosystem Analysis, Institute for Environmental Research (Biology V),  
RWTH Aachen University, Worringerweg 1, D-52074 Aachen, Germany

### Why should I care?

- Because our science is connected to **every day lives**
- Environment health and quality readily impacts our **well-being**
- Findings from environmental research can raise **major interest** in the public

### BUT...

...are also prone to serious **misunderstanding**

...attention for environmental sciences and

coverage by the **media is weak**

...as our research is so closely associated with  
public opinions, fears and desires, many **pitfalls**

**lie ahead**

...widespread **restraint** in environmental sciences  
to engage in science communication

### What's in there for me?

A rough categorization based on a 2006 Gel  
Conference talk by marketing expert Seth Godin, on  
failures in product design and customer loyalty

⇒ **"BROKEN"!**

- Categories also apply to outreach activities
- Science communication as an approach to market  
scientific findings

As in economy, broken relations to our target groups  
will reduce attention for our research findings, and  
hence our impact.

### Disclaimer

This list does not make a claim to be complete. It  
points at general considerations behind science  
communication especially of environmental research.  
It aims to make you think and become aware of the  
major pitfalls. By clearly naming them and proposing  
solutions it hopefully encourages environmental  
scientists to engage in stronger communication efforts  
in the future.

Discuss with Thomas about other examples and further  
categories

### How does it work?

Use the following categories and examples to evaluate your communication and outreach  
activities, receive help from the offered solutions.

#### I am not a fish



A culvert that fish cannot use. Designed by  
someone who will never use it (is not a fish).

EXAMPLE: *Presentation design.* Slides were designed for the speaker, not the audience.

SOLUTION: Use modern approaches like presentationzen and the ideas by Jean-Luc Dumont;  
practice with Powerpoint karaoke to learn looking from a different perspective.

#### I didn't know



Mitsubishi has an SUV named Pajero. In Spanish  
"Pajero" is a vulgar term. They maybe didn't know.

EXAMPLE: *Press releases.* They have to be of a certain structure and content to work. If you do not  
know you have a high chance to fail.

SOLUTION: Learn about the characteristics of press releases and the reasons behind. Maybe your  
institution offers such seminars. And certainly your press office can help you.

#### Selfish jerks



Spam messages hurt a brand, as soon as they  
are perceived as annoying. They do not care.

EXAMPLE: *Audience-specific communication.* Your outreach does not take into account the  
audience: knowledge, interests, opinions, desires, fears.

SOLUTION: Define your key message specifically for the respective audience. Be clear whom you  
talking to. If you know what you want to tell, you also know how to.

#### Not my job



The person who empties the garbage can has not  
the job to request a larger or a second one.

EXAMPLE: *Press office communications.* PR staff might not see it as their job to take care of your key  
message.

SOLUTION: Put effort into (a) defining your key message properly, and (b) telling the press office  
what is really important about your news.

#### Contradictions



A digital wine list is the opposite of the feeling and  
the atmosphere of tradition wine is all about.

EXAMPLE: *Ambiguous statements.* While science incorporates uncertainty, non-scientists might  
expect clear answers. They will pick from your messages what they expect  
(confirmation bias).

SOLUTION: Not so easy. Learn science communication in courses, if available. This is a hard part.

#### World changed



In the digital age the power of interpretation is no  
longer a privilege of politicians.

EXAMPLE: *Social media in science.* If you are not using social media you miss out on some  
important target groups.

SOLUTION: Learn how to, and then use social media. There are more and more courses available at  
SETAC conferences. Probably also your institution has such offers.

Want to hear about the 7th category? Ask Thomas!

