

TRANSCRIPT

Starting Science Shops in NZ

An introduction by Mary Gardner

slides courtesy of International Science Shops Network and TRAMS

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(Comments and suggestions please to M Gardner. mgardner@mgardner.info Thanks)

Text for ppt slides 1-19 of "science shops A"

1. Kia ora! I'm Mary Gardner. I'm a NZer, a freelance writer, biologist and photographer who spent the last year overseas in Australia and Europe. At one time, I was in Utrecht, the Netherlands. This is a picture of the sculpture I found along the canal downtown. I love the enthusiasm that is obvious in both the horse and the rider. The reason I was in Utrecht is because I won a scholarship to attend a summer school course at the University. Thirty four people from fourteen countries came together to learn how to start science shops in their own countries. And the news? What's the news? The news is

2. Science shops are exciting. Science shops are about creating knowledge for the community, in the community, with the community. We all know government has access to research in science – social science, natural science, medical, engineering, technology, the lot. And big business has access to research too. What science shops do is help communities have access to science, to research. And a community that knows for themselves what research can be for them, about the issues that concern them -- a community that can use research as a tool – the result is not just a knowledge economy, but a knowledge society. That's exciting.

3. There are some 70 shops in about 30 countries, mostly in the EU but not exclusively. For all their differences, they are agreed on this definition: science shops are independent, participatory research support, for civil society, in response. That last part is really important.

4. Science shops work in the very heart of society. Right here, in the middle. For New Zealand, there is now the opportunity to become a member of the international network, to become a collaborator, to give and receive support.

5. The EU is quite serious about promoting science shops. The EU funds TRAMS, a training and mentoring programme. They finance training courses, like the one I attended. There is a website, a magazine, conferences. Research money is earmarked for community based research projects. And this morning, I

got an email from science shops in Austria. They say that their representative in the planning committee of the Science in Society 2007 research programme is recommending that science shops are mentioned explicitly. And the rep is also looking to make a “call for more science shops” in 2008. Another email from Germany says they will liaise with their rep to second the motion.

Now the EU gets inspiration for science shops from this, the universal declaration of human rights.

6. Individual countries find their inspiration in different laws and policies. This is the Dutch example. Their university mission statement includes service to society.

7. They also have this regulation, which means that researchers are charged with raising awareness about social responsibilities through their work and with their students.

8. But what is really inspiring are the benefits from this community based work. There is an “ennobling” of knowledge. There is an obvious social value: results have an impact at local, national and international levels. And there is “avoided social cost” – avoided pollution, degradation, avoided litigation, --- and negative data is so hard to assess but it is becoming plain that opportunities in community are grasped rather than wasted and human potential is enhanced, developed. How exciting is that?

9. For universities, the benefits are huge. There is a revitalization of the curricula, on many levels.

10. For students? Students really like working in science shop projects because they have hands-on experience in the community. The relevance of what they are learning is plain. And they are seen by the community – after all, this is where they are going to be working soon enough.

And the community – the organizations, the NGOs and SMEs (small to medium enterprises) -- they experience first hand what research can offer them, what value there is to have R & D helping them with their day to day work. When you remember that SMEs are the model for most of NZ’s businesses and that their involvement with research is really lacking – when you realize that NGOs are an important centre of community work, paid and unpaid – you realize what potential science shops can develop here.

11. Now NZ does not have to re-invent the wheel about science shops. This week the International Network of Science Shops has released a draft version of their Toolbox, with papers and documents and

12. Case studies and procedures and policies and advice like this here. E-modules are also being prepared.

13. Now whatever it is called – and there are many different names, they are not always called science shops – there are four main players. This is what we here in NZ must figure out. We need to identify our clients: who do we mean by organization, by NGO, by SME – is there a way individuals can be clients?

The researchers – universities with science shops have job descriptions that mean researchers can participate in science shop projects as part of their work. Sometimes, a job description is adapted to be even more specific. Some science shops are outside universities altogether and they do the research themselves or negotiate with researchers project by project.

There is a need for a host: this can be a university, which is most common in Netherlands. In Bonn, the science shop is a stand alone NGO, in Liverpool the science shop is an NGO within the social science department.

Finally there is need for dedicated science shop staff. These are paid positions. The science shop staff facilitates between all the players, clients, researchers and host.

14. This is a model of the many organizational models there are supporting science shops. As you can see, some are based in universities, some are not. Funding for these science shops comes in many different ways. In Romania and Belgium, the government is so supportive of Science Shops they simply pay for a Science Shop staff in every university. By contrast, the Bonn science shop generates its own income as well as applying for external funds on a project by project basis.

15. To help us here in NZ, the Toolkit also includes a Scenario Workshop. It is a day long seminar where the core representatives from all four groups come together and dream up a local version of the Science Shops.

16. EU interest in NZ is strong. I met many Science Shop people who would love to email with likeminded workers in NZ. They want to begin collaborations in some way. But they cannot see where to start. By setting up science shops, identifying what we already do and getting more clear about what else we can do, we can make ourselves more obvious to workers in EU and beyond.

This would help change one of NZ's big intellectual difficulties – isolation.

Science shops would also help us here with issues about integrity and independence. What Science Shops would do is help provide a platform for community and researchers to work from, to stand from. The turangawaewae.

17. And that's why Science Shops are so exciting.

18. Now I want to open this up for discussion, for whatever you want to find out. I have a set of slides about different case studies and projects. For example, this is what the Bonn Science Shop is doing.

19. And I also have details about the different organizational models that are used. This here is Tilberg, with a service for NGOs and community as well as a service for SMEs.

I also have an action research project up about starting science shops in NZ. I am about to travel the major centres throughout NZ talking with people. Five overseas science shops have agreed to join in the project already. If you want to stay informed and perhaps take part in this, please send me your email and phone number. I will keep you in touch.

So now, what do you want to know --?