

**Children's Universities - A global approach to support academic
engagement with and for children**

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During the last decade, the term "Children's University" became a widespread synonym for science communication and outreach programs at Universities or with a strong link to the academia - typically targeted towards children aged 7-14 years. Even before, occasional science programs, open labs or other outreach programmes could be identified at universities - but the highly innovative aspect of Children's Universities is rooted in the fact that within a relatively short period and encouraged by some successful lighthouse initiatives, a larger number of universities and other science institutions implemented programs for this totally unusual audience for the very first time. In a recent survey more than 350 comparable initiatives have been identified by EUCU.NET. By using similar labels, they are forming a massive and recognizable approach – and the consequences are apparent: Universities are encouraged to consider their role within the communities around them and to become aware of needs and perceptions of their potential future students. Universities and academics are more and more called upon to present their academic work to justify their position in society. Children's Universities support an increasing number of institutions and academics to reflect on their complex and sometimes out-of-touch research in a way that aims to meet the demands of curious children and - on top of this - of their whole social context. Beyond that, scientists experience satisfaction through purpose when sharing their research and knowledge about their topics with these very unusual recipients at eye level. In this talk, we will reflect on this development - and outline what EUCU.NET - the European Network of Children's Universities - is aiming to contribute to analyzing the impact of Children's Universities,

as well as to quality development of such initiatives. It will also include practical examples of a Children's University, notably from the Children's University at the EAFIT University in Medellin, which was established in 2005 as one of the first initiatives of this kind in South America. It has successfully managed to establish new ways of appropriating and using knowledge, science and research in their target public: children, youth, school teachers and academics. EAFIT has been associated with EUCU.NET network activities from the very beginning.

Another initiative, funded by the France Berkeley Fund, uses synchrotrons or "light sources" as teaching tools for real world research in chemistry, physics and biology. The project, "Student Science at Synchrotrons" aims to develop a hands-on educational program to introduce high-school students to the diverse scientific opportunities at synchrotrons. It counts on an international collaboration among American and French synchrotron facilities and the main target are underrepresented students who would not normally have access to research facilities.

As a third example, the National Center of Science Education in Denmark is engaged in the effort of strengthening children's interest by building up cooperation among teachers in order to develop teaching as a creative and experimental process. The institution takes a leading role in this process, therefore collaborating closely with all levels of interest groups: leaders of municipalities, school leaders, and teachers but also Universities and Science Centers.

Several projects focus on building bridges between schools, high school and universities.

The projects provide examples of young to young teaching, collaboration with enterprises and collaboration with informal Science Centers. The goal is that students, through practical work with science related to the university, businesses or informal, will experience more meaningful learning and see possible education pathways and professional working life. The relationship will enhance learning opportunities through alignment of educational goals. In this complementary relationship, each sector brings special expertise into the collaboration and this result in a greater synergy. This will give the educational time and space a whole new dimension. By combining the efforts of the formal and informal education sectors the project makes a constructive alliance.

All in all, the three mentioned example can outline how the engagement of children and young people, especially in informal settings and environments which are not typically intended for children, as well as innovative and transsectoral cooperation may have an impact of the development of aspirations and attitudes towards science – with a notable focus on social inclusion in particular regional settings.