

RISS, the Italian network of Science Shops

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The Italian Network of Science Shops is born: it unites realities which collect and carry on ideas for scientific research proposed by citizens

In the featured image the founders of the RISS network: from left to right, Giovanna Grossi (University of Brescia), Franco Bagnoli (University of Florence), Matteo Serra (Bruno Kessler Foundation), Giovanna Pacini (University of Florence), Andrea Vargiu (University of Sassari)

Promoting and carrying out coordinated participatory research initiatives: this is the spirit of **“RISS”**, the **Italian Network of Science Shops**, presented on 12 February 2020 in Rome at the [Binario F](#) venue. The network – which includes the universities of Florence, Brescia and Sassari and the Bruno Kessler Foundation – connects the Italian realities that directly involve citizenship, and in some cases also school, in scientific research activities, experimenting in particular the modality known as **“science shop”**.

The science shops, born in the 70s in the Netherlands and now widespread in most of Europe, are structures that bridge the world of scientific research and that of the so-called **“civil society”**, collecting ideas and research proposals from citizens and bringing them to the attention of researchers, who in some cases transform these ideas into real **research projects**. It is something different, therefore, from the best known *citizen science*, where citizens and enthusiasts participate in a research project joining in “after the game started”, for example with the remote collection and analysis of data (as in many **astronomy** projects) or even with field observations (especially in **naturalistic** or **environmental** projects).

In science shops instead citizens themselves propose the **idea** for the research project, while usually it is only the researchers who carry out the research (although there are cases in which the proposers may have an active role even in the implementation phase). In many cases then, especially with regard to science shops that rely on public universities (which are the majority),

research projects in the name of citizens are carried out by **PhD students** or even by **university students**, who often base their final dissertation or pre-graduate internship on such projects, as happens for example at the [University of Lyon](#).

In recent years, the creation and growth of numerous European science shops have been supported by many projects funded by the **European Union**. There is also a network, called [Living Knowledge](#), which unites the science shops of the old continent.



Il logo della Rete
Italiana Sportelli della
Scienza (RISS)

What about in **Italy**? In our country, as regards the science shops, the tradition is very scarce. However in recent years, thanks to some European projects involving many partners across Europe, the number of Italian science shops has finally started to increase. The most long-lived is the [FOIST Laboratory](#) of the **University of Sassari**, now directed by **Andrea Vargiu** and founded in 1977, which has always been engaged in research and social promotion activities with local communities.

More recently, the [science shop](#) of the **University of Florence**, led by **Franco Bagnoli** and **Giovanna Pacini** within the European [INSPIRES](#) project, and the "[WatShop](#)" of the **University of Brescia**, coordinated by **Giovanna Grossi** within the framework of the [SciShops](#) project, have added in.

For about two years, also the **Bruno Kessler Foundation** has had its own science shop too, named "[La bottega della scienza](#)" (within the "[STAR communicators of science](#)" call, funded by the Autonomous Province of Trento), which in addition to researchers and citizens also involves local **schools**.

These four realities, which previously worked together on some common projects, have decided to make their collaboration even more solid by creating **the national RISS network**. During the presentation on 12 February 2020, the promoters illustrated the activities of the individual "nodes" of the network, as well as proposing a general discussion on the topic of science shops. The event was recorded and it is possible to view it in full on the [Youtube](#) channel of **Caffè-Scienza Firenze**.

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