

When research is carried out by citizens

December 7, 2017

CNR hosted the first Italian conference on citizen science, dedicated to research projects that directly involve non-professionals

Can citizens play an active role in research? Of course, but with appropriate “curbs”. This was discussed at the **National Research Council (CNR)** in Rome, which hosted the first Italian conference on citizen science November 23 through 25, literally “citizens’ science”. In fact, for several decades now, some research projects ranging from biology to botany, astronomy and technology, offer the opportunity for non-expert enthusiasts to play an active role in research, for example in the collection of data, images and information or in the evaluation of a research product.

The Roman conference, commissioned by **Emilia Chiancone**, biologist and president of the **National Academy of Sciences**, brought together the main Italian “players” involved in the promotion of citizen science research projects, while also offering the stage to international guests.

In particular, the first day of the three-day event was dedicated to the discussion of citizen science projects concerning **biological monitoring**, while on the second day the focus shifted to projects related to **technology** and online platforms and their relationship with **society**. The program wrapped up, on November 25, with a **round-table discussion** on the relationship between citizen science and communication, held at the **civic museum of zoology** of Villa Borghese.

Speakers included figures such as **Alan Irwin**, of the Business School in Copenhagen and “inventor” – in the mid-90s – of the term “citizen science”, **Katrin Vohland**, member of the **ECSA** (European Citizen Science Association) Board and **Sven Schade** from the European Commission’s Joint Research Center. Italian speakers included (among others) **Ferdinando Boero**, professor of zoology at the University of Salento who has been engaged in projects of citizen science in the marine environment for years now, **Andrea Sforzi**, director of the natural history museum of Maremma, and **Nico Pitrelli**, physicist and science communicator at SISSA in Trieste.

The conference pointed out the many **strengths** of citizen science – above all the possibility of making citizens more responsible and aware of scientific research, and at the same time the breaking down of barriers (often still existing) between researchers and civil society – but also its

critical issues: in particular, a certain mistrust, still very present, on the part of researchers, of citizens. For this reason, as emerged at the end of the works, the growth prospects of the sector are still very wide.

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