Science communication, public understanding versus professional careers

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It is a widespread misunderstanding that the inflow in natural science and engineering is decreasing. Over the past decades this inflow is remarkably constant in the Netherlands, at least on the university level. This means that increasing problems on the labour marked are not caused by changing interest among students, but by changing demands in the labour marked. ¹ This changes in labour marked will differ from country to country. In industrialised countries transitions takes place from production to service industry while developing countries moves from agriculture to production industry.

Thy myth of the decreasing inflow in natural science and engineering is ‘discovered’ by independent organisations, which are mainly financed by the government. Getting money from the government and keeping your independence is quite common in the Netherlands; some say it is a typical product of the so-called Dutch polder-model.

To fulfil the labour marked needs in the field of the natural science and engineering, educational innovations are necessary. When the product is not changed the inflow will not improve. Organisations in the field of science communication should not focus primarily on professional careers. Bridging gaps between science and public is the main issue. As far as professional careers concerned, science communication can help to bridge the gap between different scientific cultures.

¹ The conclusion that the overall inflow is constant, implicates that fields with growing inflow, like computer sciences and life science, ‘steal’ students from other fields. The decreasing inflow in the ‘classical sciences’ like physics and chemistry can create specific problems on the labour marked.