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Networking Light Source Facilities and User Organizations Through an Online Community of Practice

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Background: Synchrotron Light Sources and Social Networks

For 10+ years, the African Light Source Foundation and project (AfLS) have been capacity building in terms of human resources, global networking, and local laboratory infrastructure; all towards the realization of 4th generation synchrotron light source on the African continent.

We are building networks, identifying partners, organizing training, mobility, workshops, schools and conferences, and optimizing the use of existing funding instruments. We make and build upon strong foundations, including a massive campaign for a strong researcher user base, and a well-informed policy-maker cohort, not only across Africa but globally linked, and we audit the progress in terms of science and capacity.

For several reasons, synchrotrons offer a good opportunity to understand international professional networks of personnel, ideas, and resources. First, all synchrotrons, even where they are nationally owned facilities, host researchers of different nationalities. The staff responsible for the maintenance and development of a particular synchrotron are almost always citizens of diverse nationalities. In synchrotrons for their experiments form specific and closely interacting international scientific communities. [[More]]

So, it follows that that a major objective of aspiring synchrotron light source facilities should be to organize themselves into a common networked community, and to plug itself into to the community of existing facilities and users. Professional social networking follows from the seminal work of Granovetter who argued in 1973 that weak ties are particularly helpful in delivering new opportunities because they introduce novel information to a broader social network.

While Granovetter's original analysis mainly focused on the labor market and employment, the same principles, in the main, hold true for diffusion of technical information and tacit knowledge as well as for efficacy and productivity of team science. The central theory of the approach of this project is 'embeddedness', the core concept of economic sociology.

Organization Framework of the African Light Source Online Community of Practice

The objective is to create an online community of practice for the African Light Source that includes our Partner Organizations, e.g., disciplinary professional societies, facility users organizations, and participating synchrotron facilities.

The OCOP features include engagement features like extended profiles including bibliography listing, the ability to make connections by 'friending' and/or 'liking' individuals, partners, and content; private messaging, forums and groups, individual and group blogs, document libraries, knowledge-base wikis, collaboration space, and online courses.

The site can be responsive to multiple domain names with a customized landing page for each, e.g.,

<https://sayansi.africanlightsource.org>

<https://community.caribbeanlightsource.org>

<https://africanmineralogy.org>

<https://synchrotron.africanmaterialsresearchsociety.org>

The intent is to offer NGOs, facility users organizations, facilities themselves, et al, a branded portal where their respective members and employees can network with colleagues across academic disciplines and research organizations. Light source facilities can have a presence on the site, down to a per beam line basis.

<https://lightsourceusers.org/partners/>

Thus, the site will facilitate a global network of light source users.

As the website use progresses, a possible outcome is development of an International Union of Synchrotron Light Source Users that could apply for ISC membership.

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