

Where 2B & Y

Science as a Human Right International Science Center and Science Museum Day (ISCSMD)

10 November 2018—at a science mu-
seum near you
by Walter Staveloz

For many years, science centers and museums have joined, together or as an organized field under the Association of Science Technology Centers' (ASTC) leadership in various International Years celebrating topics related to science.

Most recently, a ASTC worldwide program "IGLO, International action on GLObal warming" was recognized as part of the International Polar Year (2007-2008). One of the main actions was the albedo project where 20 science centers selected on all continents created white spots (representing the Poles) outside their doors to reflect sunlight to explain the albedo effect and illustrate the need to fight global warming and preserve the poles. Two NASA satellites captured the images and calculated the sun's reflection. In Australia, the spot was shaped like a kangaroo and its picture was shared by over 60 national newspapers and TV stations worldwide reaching 1.8 billion people, the biggest ever for a science center project.

Just after that, in 2009, ASTC joined with the International Year of Astronomy and set up a totally different project. The American Astronomical Society produced very cheap telescopes, but only for US institutions to buy and share with their visitors. We agreed



that US institutions could buy a number of these and ship them to a science center in developing countries so that they could join the effort at no cost.

Many of ASTC members participated individually in the 2015 International Year of Light. If anything, what these partnerships proved was that whether it was ASTC organized participation or an individual one, joining an official celebration has many advantages and shed light on whoever is joining.

This year ASTC is working on a project to create an interactive display to create awareness about threats to coral reefs and ways we can possibly save them in the frame of the International Year of Coral Reefs (IYCR).

This increasing understanding has slowly transformed into the understanding that creating something that would focus attention uniquely on our own field would help us to be more recognized as an important and necessary instrument in the global science education ecosystem and secondarily help with the creation of new partnerships to achieve our mission. This would also allow us to fight the widespread misconception that science centers are merely nice playgrounds for children, and get the word out that we are part of life-long learning and public engagement with science.

Looking to what is coming ahead, a number of people proposed to create an International Year of Science Centers in 2019 because of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the Exploratorium in San Francisco and the Ontario Science Center in Toronto. Dr. Mamoru Mohri, the Director of Miraikan, the Museum of Emerging Science and Technology in Tokyo and host



In Newcastle, 200 children celebrate the launch of 2016 International Science day outside Life Science Centre.

of the Science Center World Summit (SCWS2017) met in 2016 with the UNESCO leadership in Paris.

That meeting was meant to set the collaboration between UNESCO and Miraikan for the SCWS2017 and addressed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a central element of that Summit but ultimately resulted in UNESCO suggesting a more intentional and long-term relationship with the science center field around the implementation of the SDGs. In 2016, The existing UNESCO World Science Day for Peace and Development, organized every year on 10 November, would celebrate science centers and science museums as partners for the SDGs. This would be the first edition of an International Science Center and Science Museum Day.

Since a group of science centers had in that year started to celebrate Pi Day with some success, the idea of a yearly one day event for science center's rapidly became more attractive than a single one year long event. The International Science Center and Science Museum Day was born.

There was a very limited preparation time for the first one in 2016, but we accepted the challenge focusing on a very simple idea: all science centers already address one or more of the 17 SDGs. They just may not know it. So our main challenge was to convince our members that they would be able to join by using ISCSMD to focus something they already were doing. We just asked them to formally confirm that they were part of it; to use common messaging tools; and to let their visitors, their stakeholders, and local press know about it. On our side we collected good stories on how SDGs were presented as a source of inspiration for all others. Eventually, more than 300 institutions contributed to an interactive world map that showed the unique diversity of programs offered to our audiences that day. During a common event at UNESCO headquarters live connections were established with science centers around the world. With Questacon in Canberra, a gala dinner held ambassadors from 60 countries celebrating the SDGs under the motto: "There is no Planet B." At the Natural History Museum in Vienna, 17 booths representing the 17 goals were spread through the museum and scientists had dialogues with the visitors on each of them. In South Africa, the local science center network was holding its annual meeting, and the call for proposals for sessions actually included the request to address the way the topic was linked to the SDGs. In



In 2017, in Slovenia's capital Ljubljana, the science center involved several bookstores in the city in a science exploration of the city and bookstores featured books about sustainability.

Washington DC schoolkids from DC public schools met with NASA scientists to test a cloud observation app, illustrating the importance of understanding the role of clouds in global warming. Ambassadors to UNESCO and staff were extremely impressed by the collective force of science centers working together on a single topic. And this has remained the motor for the cooperation over the last two years. This success should not hide the fact that growing the movement is a challenge. How can we make sure that local science centers and museum see the benefit of joining in a worldwide movement? Although we have several testimonies on how the SDGs have proven to be relevant for science centers and their communities, we have a long way to go in sharing that message with the field at large. For the 2018 edition we have adopted the UNESCO World Science Day as a sub-theme. **"Science, a Human Right."** We see this as a larger frame and not conflicting with the SDGs. After some discussion we invite our members to look into their inclusion practices and make 10 November 2018 a celebration of our vision that everyone should have access to science.

Walter Staveloz <wstaveloz@astc.org> is Director International Relations, Association of Science-Technology Centers (www.astc.org)

<http://www.iscsmd.org/>