

that LPs make use of an expensive resource and that they have to provide additional benefits for the community. This has led to the requirement that reduced data from LPs, once published, should be returned to the ESO Archive so that they can be used by other astronomers, possibly for different purposes. The large investment by the community into LPs should justify this modest return. There was a lively discussion on how this return should be achieved and whether it would put astronomers using ESO facilities at a disadvantage compared to users of private observatories.

The workshop overall was very successful and clarified the need for, and the competitive edge of, Large Programmes at ESO facilities. The increased demand for the 3.6-metre telescope after the time limit for LPs was raised to four years speaks for itself. There are some very substantial programmes in progress, which will keep this telescope busy for years to come.

Beyond the Large Programmes, the Public Surveys with VISTA and VST will start during this year and next year. These will be truly massive projects, which

complement the current arsenal of programme types undertaken with ESO facilities at the upper end. It is planned to monitor their success in another workshop in a few years time.

References

Wagner, S. & Leibundgut, B. 2004, *The Messenger*, 115, 41

Notes

¹ <http://www.eso.org/sci/meetings/LP2008/program.html>

ESO and the International Year of Astronomy 2009 Opening Ceremony

Pedro Russo^{1 2}
Lars Lindberg Christensen¹
Douglas Pierce-Price¹

¹ ESO

² International Astronomical Union

The ESO contributions to the International Year of Astronomy 2009 and the Opening Ceremony, held in Paris in January 2009, are summarised.

“The International Year of Astronomy 2009 is an important step in furthering the interest of the public in what is arguably the oldest of all sciences: astronomy.” ESO Director General, Tim de Zeeuw, on the United Nations proclaiming 2009 as the International Year of Astronomy.

Few areas of science touch on as many topics of interest for the general public as astronomy. For countless thousands of years, eyes have gazed up at the heavens and wondered; it could be argued that everyone is born an astronomer. Modern astronomy is a highly professional field, but is not exclusively the domain of specialised scientists. The sky is a shared resource and intense public



Credit: IAU/José Francisco Salgado

Figure 1. Catherine Cesarky, IAU President, addressing the audience during the IYA2009 Opening Ceremony

interest means that many organisations, such as ESO, invest in outreach initiatives.

The year 2009 has been launched by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009) under the theme “The Universe,

Yours to Discover”. The IYA2009 marks the 400th anniversary of the first astronomical observation through a telescope by Galileo Galilei. Proclaimed by the United Nations (UN) and endorsed by the International Council for Science, the IYA2009 has already captured the imagination of countless individuals. The aim of the IYA2009 is to stimulate worldwide interest, especially among young people, in astronomy and science. Events and activities will promote a greater appreciation of the inspirational aspects of astronomy that ESO is keen to foster.

The opening ceremony of IYA2009 was held in Paris, on 15–16 January, 2009, under the aegis of the UN, UNESCO and the IAU. The ceremony itself featured keynote speeches, research findings, an exhibition and also social aspects. About 900 people attended, among them eminent scientists, including Nobel Laureates, and also around 100 young students from individual countries. The ceremony was very well received, and the quality of talks highly praised. The enthusiasm of all involved shone through, and proved that



Figure 2. A video link with Paranal made a big impression on the audience. Here, ESO Director General Tim de Zeeuw is seen talking to Christophe Dumas on the big screen, live from the VLT Control Room.

the IYA2009 has already gained plenty of momentum to help popularise astronomy throughout 2009, and beyond.

ESO's contribution to the ceremony

ESO held an exhibition at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris as part of the opening ceremony. The exhibition presented information about ESO's role in astronomy and the Very Large Telescope (VLT), the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT) and the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) projects. A scale model of the E-ELT complemented the exhibition. The official IYA2009 brochure, an E-ELT brochure, and "Eyes on the Skies" DVDs were available for visitors.

The afternoon session on Thursday, 15 January, was chaired by the ESO Director General Tim de Zeeuw. The session saw two fascinating talks: "The New Frontier: The Exploration of the Solar System" by André Brahic; and "Echoes of Creation: Discovery of the Big Bang Fossil Radiation", by Nobel Laureate Robert Wilson. A highlight on Friday, 16 January, was Tim de Zeeuw's overview of ESO activities and the live video conference from the auditorium in Paris to ESO's VLT on Cerro



Figure 3. The ESO exhibition took prominent position in the display room.

Paranal in Chile. This was a rare opportunity for the audience to join astronomers at work in the VLT control room, towards the end of the Chilean night. Christophe Dumas, head of the Science Operations Department at the VLT, discussed the night's observations and shared a recent image from the telescope. You can watch this on the IYA2009 Opening Ceremony video archive¹. IYA2009 science writer, Lee Pullen, kept a "Cosmic Diary Live-Blog" during the ceremony. This diary of events was regularly updated, and followed by people in over 130 countries.

ESO's commitment to public outreach and to IYA2009

Since plans for IYA2009 were first laid in 2003, ESO has played a major role in the project. ESO is hosting the IYA2009 Secretariat for the International Astronomical Union, which coordinates the activities globally. ESO is one of the Organisational Associates of IYA2009, and was also closely involved in the resolution submitted to the UN by Italy, which led to the 62nd General Assembly of the UN proclaiming 2009 as the International Year of Astronomy.

In addition to a wide array of activities planned both at the local and international level, ESO is leading three of the eleven global Cornerstone projects. These are 100 Hours of Astronomy, a worldwide observing marathon during which ESO will



Figure 4. The International Year of Astronomy 2009 logo.

coordinate a 24-hour webcast from research observatories; the Cosmic Diary, a blog that gives the public insight into the lives of professional astronomers; and the Portal to the Universe, a global one-stop website for online astronomy content.

The IYA2009 Secretariat at ESO HQ is the central hub of the IAU's implementation of the IYA2009, and was established to coordinate activities during the planning, execution and evaluation of IYA2009. The secretariat liaises continuously with the — currently 137 — national nodes, task groups, partners and organisational associates, the media and the general public to ensure the progress of IYA2009 at all levels. The secretariat is staffed by Pedro Russo, the IYA2009 coordinator, IYA2009 assistant Mariana Barrosa and is managed by Lars Lindberg Christensen, head of ESO's education and Public Outreach Department. ESO's own organisational IYA2009 contact is Douglas Pierce-Price.

Astronomy is one of the oldest fundamental sciences, yet continues to make a profound impact on our culture and is a powerful expression of the human intellect. 2009 is the year in which individuals and organisations can make a difference by popularising astronomy as never before and really "bring the Universe down to Earth". ESO's presence at the opening ceremony shows our commitment to this grand aim.

Notes

¹ <http://www.astronomy2009.org/webcast>