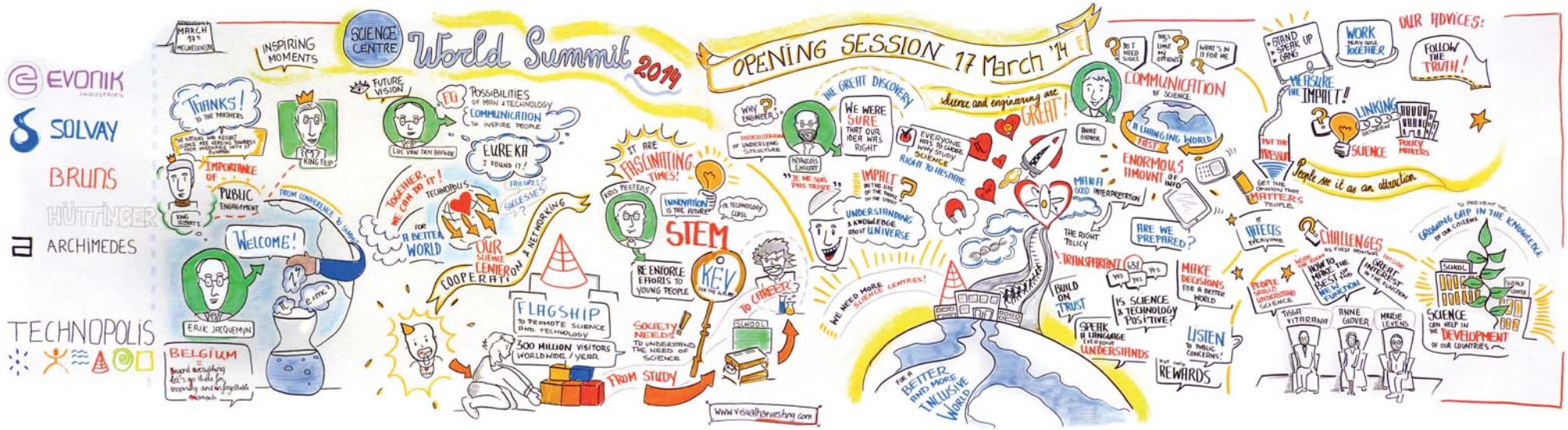

19 MARCH 2014

SCWS2014
science centre world summit

Mechelen Declaration

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR A BETTER WORLD

Introduction

The leaders of science centres and museums from 58 countries around the world came together at the Science Centre World Summit, in Mechelen, Belgium from March 17-19, 2014. This high-level international gathering of 443 attendees built upon the contributions of the previous six World Congress meetings held since 1996 on different continents. During this Summit, science centre leaders met with global policy makers, scientists and leading business representatives to exchange ideas about science, public engagement with science and the role that science communication and science centres should play in our rapidly changing society. With a continuing commitment to impact, the science centre field puts forward this Declaration as a worldwide action plan.

Since 1996, there has been a marked increase in the number of science-based public policy issues in areas such as climate and energy, pandemic disease, digital privacy and research. Public engagement with science has increased, and the digital revolution that has radically changed our relationship with technology has created new modes of communication and learning. Science centres have shown a remarkable range of diverse responses, adapting to local contexts, responding to community needs and reflecting policies of inclusiveness. Governments, scientific enterprises, international institutions, multi-national corporations and the education field all recognise that citizen engagement in current global scientific and technological issues is crucial to the advancement, prosperity and welfare of everyone. Nearly 3 000 science centres worldwide are spearheading hands-on, enquiry-based learning, and have achieved a high trust rating among their more than 310 million annual participants.

Increasingly, science centres are moving beyond the traditional hands-on exploration of scientific phenomena. Many centres are engaging with their audiences in the dialogues that address global challenges, and equipping them to become active players within their communities – thereby helping to achieve the current Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, and the Sustainable Development Goals to be launched in 2015.

Science Centre World Impact

Considerable progress in our field has been made since the World Congress in 2011. Numerous new science centres have been established - especially in Africa, Latin America, around the Mediterranean, in Eastern Europe and in Asia - with increased attention to local context, indigenous knowledge and diverse audiences. There are many more examples of increased dialogue between scientists and the general public, through which public opinions on science and technology can be heard and incorporated into decision-making. People are now better able to comment on science investment and policy development processes, and are encouraged and educated to make active commitments to solving global and regional problems. A significant increase in the extent to which science centres have promoted creativity, invention and innovation has led to more sustainable lifestyles.

The Science Centre World Summit 2014

There has been an unprecedented development of partnerships, promoting science awareness and engagement across cultural, political, economic and geographical boundaries. Stronger collaborations have now been created with formal education, the arts, business, policy makers and media worldwide. The Science Centre World Summit 2014 provided the opportunity to continue this process, to retool existing partnerships and to build new collaborative efforts with shared visions for the future. It was a valuable occasion for addressing the challenges presented by continually changing multifaceted circumstances for both science centres and partners.

The 2014 Summit worked to convince more policy makers, scientists, global companies and multi-national institutions of the importance of collaborations with science centres throughout the world. Such collaborations will be steps towards the common goal of bridging the gap between citizens and science and technology, and thus to resolving many global problems. Science centres are not simply places where visitors have nice learning experiences or a great time on a rainy afternoon; they are unique institutions that transform the way in which people of all ages think and act. Reinforcing the collaborations will advance issues related to the public engagement with science and technology at a higher strategic level than before. At the same time, these partnerships will create a climate in which all parties support one another's messages and tasks.

Therefore science centres, worldwide, and their partners commit to these goals toward the future:

We will ...

1. Investigate how to engage even more effectively with local communities and increasingly diverse audiences, and keep the focus on gender differences in engagement.
2. Continue taking actions that have a positive global impact and that will make people everywhere more aware of the opportunities that science and technology hold for the sustainable advancement of humankind.
3. Draw the attention of decision makers and the media to the essential role of public engagement with science and technology by setting up high-profile global activities.
4. Endeavour to leverage the position of science centres as "trusted" places to introduce the public to new technological solutions and sustainable technologies, and to broaden the potential use of these solutions.
5. Take the lead in developing the best methods for engaging learners and optimizing their education in both formal and informal settings using appropriate technologies in widely varying contexts.
6. Engage the public more directly with research, using this engagement to help empower people, broaden attitudes and ensure that the work of universities and research institutions is relevant to society and to wider social concerns on a global scale.
7. Work together in a creative celebration of the International Science Centre Year 2019, encouraging people throughout the world to take part in shared experiences relating to science and technology and society.

In the presence of His Majesty King of Belgium

ASPAC — **Alan Brien**, President of ASPAC

ASTC — **Chevy Humphrey**, Chair of the Board of Directors of ASTC

ecsite — **Rosalia Vargas**, President of Ecsite

NAMES — **Mijbil Almutawa**, President of NAMES

Ganga S. Rautela, Director General of NCSM

Red-Pop — **Luisa Massarani**, Director of Red-Pop

SAASTEC — **Michael Peter**, President of SAASTEC

SCWS2014 — **Erik Jacquemyn**, Chair of the Science Centre World Summit 2014

The Following persons and organisations, present at the Science Centre World Summit welcome the science centre field's effort to start a dialogue with likeminded organisations in various ways to achieve above goals. They agree to promote the Declaration to their organisation and to respond to future invitations to discuss potential partnerships.

Kris Peeters
Minister-President of the Government of Flanders

Prof. Dr. Hans-Martin Hinz
President of ICOM

Tissa Vitarana
Senior Minister for Scientific Affairs, Sri Lanka

Anne Glover
Chief Scientific Adviser to the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso

Marie Levens
Director, Department of Human Development, Education and Employment, Organization of American States (OAS)