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POLAR WEEKS: an Education and Outreach activity to promote Antarctic science and the Antarctic Treaty System

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Information Paper submitted by Portugal, Brazil, Bulgaria, France and the United Kingdom

Summary

This paper presents POLAR WEEKS, which is an education and outreach activity undertaken by the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS) and Polar Educators International (PEI). POLAR WEEKS aims to bring together polar scientists, educators/teachers and their students in order to, between other objectives, share information about the Polar Regions, and promote the Antarctic Treaty System from an educational perspective. POLAR WEEKS has been used as a tool to promote educational activities in several Antarctic Treaty Party countries, and examples are provided to demonstrate POLAR WEEK's educational impact. We aim to stimulate further cooperation in education and outreach amongst these and other Treaty Parties, through POLAR WEEKS, which can be facilitated via, between others, scientific (e.g. APECS, SCAR), educational (e.g. PEI) and via national operators (e.g. COMNAP) organizations.

Introduction

At ATCM XXXVI, Portugal and Brazil stressed the importance of education and outreach as a potential issue for discussion at future ATCMs (para 234 in ATCM XXXVI report). At ATCM XXXVII, Brazil, Belgium, Bulgaria, Portugal and United Kingdom, along with other Parties, further emphasised the relevance of education under the Antarctic Treaty System (ATCM XXXVII/WP09), which culminated in a workshop on education at ATCM XXXVIII in Bulgaria (ATCMXXXVIII/WP52; ATCMXXXVIII/BP26). The ATCM establishment an Intersessional Contact Group on Education and Outreach during the 2015/16 intersessional period (para 371 in ATCMXXXVIII report) and education and outreach was made part of the ATCM multi-strategic plan. Here we highlight international activities that could promote international collaborations on education and outreach related to the Antarctic Treaty System. In particular, we describe the relevance of POLAR WEEKS as an educational tool. POLAR WEEKS (a legacy of the International Polar Year 2007-08) aims to bring together polar scientists, educators and teachers to conduct educational and outreach activities about the Polar Regions. POLAR WEEKS is coordinated internationally by the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS; see ATCM XXXIII/IP28) and by the Polar Educators International (PEI; see ATCM XXXVII/IP2). Here, we wish to provide an overview of how POLAR WEEKS has worked in countries worldwide.

Examples of POLAR WEEKS use by several Antarctic Treaty Parties

Brazil

The APECS-Brazil organized 14 POLAR WEEKS in the period 2012-15. Brazil considered these activities as opportunities to promote dialogue amongst scientists, educators, students and the wider community. Brazil also use the opportunity presented by POLAR WEEKS to discuss the importance of marine environments in Brazil, in comparison with Antarctic marine environments. Overall, POLAR WEEKS in Brazil resulted in more than 200 lectures throughout the country. Audiences of more than 50,000 people participated in activities (e.g. training workshops, competitions, postcard exchange among students and the traveling exhibition of photographs) and there are plans for this work to continue in the future (www.apecsbrasil.com).

Bulgaria

The APECS-Bulgaria organized 7 POLAR WEEKS during the period 2012-15. Public and school talks were presented by early career polar scientists and members of Bulgarian Antarctic expeditions. Part of POLAR WEEKS included a travelling educational exhibition that toured schools in the country presenting the history of Bulgarian polar research, recent discoveries and described daily life in Antarctica. Since 2012, APECS Bulgaria has participated actively in the Sofia Science Festival, organized by British Council, where Bulgarian polar science is one of the main topics. Other POLAR WEEKS activities are linked to the

European Researchers' Night and other polar fairs in collaboration with partner organizations. APECS Bulgaria team also participated with an Antarctic talks programme, a polar creative studio for kids and "Scientific Casino". Recognizing the power of mass media for promoting Antarctic activities, APECS Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Antarctic Institute actively seek out media coverage and make their educational activities "media friendly". As a result, polar educational events featured in more than 40 mass media outputs and 84 publications in the last year alone.

France

POLAR WEEKS in France have become a popular initiative. Over 3200 students and 128 schools from France participated in last year's activities. In view of the positive feedback received, France decided to extend this event to other French speaking countries, and presented a broad overview of the current state of polar research to students from Switzerland and Canada. POLAR WEEKS have welcomed contributions from an increasing number of young polar researchers, working in a variety of fields including biology, glaciology, geochemistry, life in the poles, medicine and policy making. In addition to the activities already mentioned France hope to organize an educational workshop at the end of the POLAR WEEKS that would offer the possibility to the students to actively participate in the question sessions. France therefore hope to see this initiative promoted in the coming years. More information about the APECS-France POLAR WEEKS can be found at the following webpage (in French): <http://www.apecs-france.org/l-educatif-et-les-poles/la-semaine-polaire>

Portugal

Portugal has been involved in POLAR WEEKS (initially called IPY Polar Day) since 2007. Today, POLAR WEEKS is coordinated by APECS Portugal and PEI in collaboration with the Portuguese Polar Program PROPOLAR. The most recent educational project 'Profession: Polar scientist', established in 2013, aimed to maintain the high level of educational activities in Portugal, in cooperation with other countries, and to bring polar scientists into classrooms through talks, skype calls (if in the field or in another country), debates and other educational activities. It involved scientists, teachers, educators and students from 11 countries worldwide (Portugal, Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, France, Norway, Netherlands and United Kingdom), gathering 21,291 students, 397 teachers/educators, 75 schools and 27 scientists directly. These interactions between Universities, research centres and educational centres nationally and internationally has shown the potential of using polar science to stimulate students for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines and workshops for teachers with polar scientists has been organized as a result (<https://www.facebook.com/workshopsPEI/>). Further cooperation with the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) is being assessed.

United Kingdom

The UK Polar Network (UKPN) is the UK's National Committee of APECS, and actively provides opportunities to strengthen polar networks. UKPN aims to conduct different activities every POLAR WEEK to target a wide and diverse audience: for example, last October UKPN, along with USAPECS, organised an extremely successful "Ask Me Anything" series on the website reddit.com, often branded as the "front page of the internet". UKPN actively responded to hundreds of questions from interested members of the public for 24 hours, and its thread at one point during the day was the 25th most active post out of millions of submissions on the site. This year, UKPN were fortunate to work alongside the Foundation for the Good Governance of International Spaces (Our Spaces) in leading the Antarctica Day Flags Initiative, where it paired participating schools all over the world with researchers conducting fieldwork on the Antarctic continent (i.e Schools were tasked with designing up to five flags that travelled with their paired researcher(s) and flown on the continent on Antarctica on Antarctica Day (1st December)).

Concluding remarks

POLAR WEEKS presents an excellent opportunity for Antarctic Treaty Parties to promote Antarctic science both nationally and internationally, by engaging Antarctic scientists with educational institutions. With examples from Brazil, Bulgaria, France, Portugal and United Kingdom, we aim to stimulate further cooperation in education and outreach amongst these and other Treaty Parties. POLAR WEEKS can be

facilitated via, between others, scientific (e.g. APECS, SCAR), educational (e.g. PEI) and via national operators (e.g. COMNAP) organizations.