

# EUROSCIENCE OPEN FORUM 2004

CLAUS MADSEN, ESO

SCIENCE reigned supreme in Stockholm for a period of four days in late August this year, as some 1800 scientists, administrators, policy-makers and media representatives from 68 countries convened at the EUROSCIENCE Open Forum, the first pan-European inter- and transdisciplinary science meeting on our Continent.

The purpose of the meeting was to 'provide an interdisciplinary forum for open dialogue, debate and discussion on science and technology in society'. With such an ambitious goal, a new meeting format to enforce the interdisciplinarity, and a fairly heterogeneous target audience, the participants clearly realized the experimental nature of this undertaking.

Nonetheless, with 270 speakers from 33 countries and more than 80 scientific workshops, symposia, plenary lectures and debates, it was clearly anything but a modest beginning. Further to this, exhibition stands at the Conference Centre, an impressive public outreach programme, including numerous events and happenings, e.g. in the nearby King's Gardens, completed the programme.

As reported in the last issue of the *Messenger*, ESO took an active part in the meeting, together with its EIROforum partners. The activities included a 3-hour session on some of the scientific activities within the EIROforum organizations, a very successful outreach event with videoconferences between some of our facilities and Swedish schoolchildren and a major exhibition stand.

Given the experimental character of the event, how did it fare?

Firstly, with a wide offer of parallel sessions, participants may have had a hard time choosing what to attend. Secondly, some scientists may have found the interdisciplinary aspect unusual. Nonetheless, as the meeting got underway, the overwhelming impression was that the idea had caught on and the format became accepted.

Many science policy makers and administrators used the opportunity to deepen their understanding of individual fields of science while at the same time discussing a wide variety of policy-related issues. These sessions were very well attended.

But the idea of the 'Open Forum' was clearly to further the dialogue between science and society. For this reason, it was particularly

pleasing to note the strong media interest. Some 350 journalists (60 from Sweden) attended the meeting, which featured a series of dedicated press briefings. One of the first press briefings dealt with the possible discovery of a rocky exoplanet, as



Moderated by Richard West from ESO, the Outreach session gave schoolchildren from Stockholm an opportunity to talk directly with scientists at the EIROforum organisations. From Paranal, Nancy Ageorges presented the VLT and took numerous questions. Seen here is Wojciech Fundamenski from the JET fusion reactor in Culham.



The ESOF 2004 venue: The Stockholm City Conference Centre, Folkets Hus, and 'Norra Latin'.



The launch of the EIROforum Science Teachers Initiative, now embedded in the NUCLEUS programme, was announced at the EIROforum stand. Speaking to the media is Russ Hodge from the EMBL.

announced by ESO on 25 August (cf ESO Press Release 22/04 'Fourteen Times the Earth - ESO HARPS Instrument Discovers Smallest Ever Extra-Solar Planet'). The media coverage, both of this particular announcement and of the many other topics discussed during the meeting was highly gratifying, conquering the front pages of renowned broadsheet newspapers such as the *Financial Times* and, on occasions, rivalling the coverage of the ongoing 2004 Olympic Games in Athens.

The next EUROSCIENCE Open Forum will take place in Munich, between 15-19 July 2006. It is hoped that many more scientists will wish to attend this meeting supporting a much increased and needed interaction between scientists, the media and the public.

All photos: Jennifer Hay (EFDA-JET/EIROforum)