

# Europe Clones U.S. Science Festival

**STOCKHOLM**—Scientists and science groupies gathered here from all quarters last week to mingle and share views at the first pan-European jam session of its kind. In the high-ceilinged classrooms of a beautifully restored 1880 grammar school, they discussed the European baby bust, the commercialization of science, and how to make sense of math for a lay audience. Former President Bill Clinton's science adviser Neal Lane gave an in-depth radio interview about nanotechnology policy, young scientists sat down for one-on-one chats with a career counselor, and a horde of noisy teenagers scoured exhibition stands for free goodies.

It all took place under the umbrella of the EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF), a new general meeting that drew 1800 people—among them more than 300 reporters—from dozens of countries to the Swedish capital, many more than the organization had hoped for.

The 4-day event is the brainchild of Carl Johan Sundberg, a physiologist at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm with a longtime interest in sharing science with the public. He first proposed the idea in 1999

gathering was distinctly European, and its multinational audience evidence that a science system long fractured along national lines is beginning to coalesce. Many sessions addressed Europe-wide issues, such as the new European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, slated to open next May in Stockholm; obstacles to career mobility; and the movement to establish a European Research Council for basic research. Indeed, the backdrop of European integration gave the meeting “tremendous symbolism,” says Frank Gannon, an Irish biologist who directs the European Molecular Biology Organization in Heidelberg, Germany.

ESOF also included a few innovations to the AAAS model, such as a daily wrap-up of events during spirited (at times hilarious) cocktail-hour debates led by BBC reporter Quentin Cooper. To get the public involved in events scattered throughout downtown Stockholm, some surprises were deployed. The most eye-catching was a German contraption, the “Amazing Profmobil,” a bicycle with a small podium and a computer screen mounted on the back that scientists could wheel into

parks and squares to explain their work to the public. (The public appeared mostly dumbfounded.)

Despite the festive atmosphere, some journalists grumbled about the meeting's heavy slant toward policy issues and a dearth of breaking science news. Apart from the announcement of the detection of the smallest known exoplanet (see p. 1382), few research results were presented. “You don't go home with a lot of news stories,” says Bruno van Wayenburg, a freelance reporter from the Netherlands. Reporter Angela Grosse of the *Hamburger Abendblatt* says that didn't bother her, because she came—like some other media representatives—primarily to find contacts and inspiration for future stories.

Sundberg counters that it's hard to persuade researchers to announce their findings at a general meeting like ESOF or the AAAS annual meeting; they prefer to inform their colleagues first. But he says the organizers will try harder next time.

Unlike the AAAS meeting, ESOF will be a biennial event; Munich will play host in 2006, and Barcelona has indicated its desire to be next after that. As other cities learn of ESOF's potential to boost their image as a science hub, Sundberg predicts, there may well be an Olympic-style bidding war for the 2008 edition.

—MARTIN ENSERINK



**Science on wheels.** From the Amazing Profmobil, parked in a busy square, Stockholm University geologist Thomas André explains the draining of the Baltic Ice Lake.

and served as chair of the steering committee. It's no secret, Sundberg says, that the smorgasbord program was not a Swedish invention but a faithful copy of the format of the annual meeting of AAAS, *Science's* publisher. Like that meeting, ESOF had multiple goals, from scientific debate to discussing the role of pure science in society and piquing the public's interest in research.

Although ESOF's model may be American, participants stressed that the theme of the

### U.S. Releases Draft Plan for Dealin With Pandemic Flu

Mounting concerns about H5N1 avian flu, which has devastated poultry farms in Asia and killed two dozen people (see p. 1385), spurred the release last week of the United States' first pandemic influenza preparedness plan.

The avian flu outbreak has experts worried that the H5N1 virus could morph into a lethal strain passed from person to person. The draft document from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) describes plans to increase surveillance for such potentially deadly flu strains, expand vaccine manufacturing, stockpile antivirals, and coordinate response to any outbreak ([www.hhs.gov/nvpo/pandemicplan/index.html](http://www.hhs.gov/nvpo/pandemicplan/index.html)). The plan “draws up on the wealth of experience” that the United States has gained dealing with SARS and other threats, says HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson.

But the plan leaves open for discussion details such as who should receive limited supplies of flu drugs and vaccines. “There will be some tough choices,” says Bruce Gellin, director of HHS's National Vaccine Program Office. The deadline for comments is 26 October.

—JOCELYN KAISER

### In Settlement, Glaxo Agrees to Publicize Drug Trial Data

Just 12 weeks after New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer charged British drug giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) with fraud in selling drugs for children, his office has settled the case out of court. Glaxo, accused of understating the clinically documented risks of suicide among youthful users of its antidepressant Paxil (*Science*, 11 June, p. 1576), last week agreed to pay a \$2.5 million fine and provide public Web access to clinical trial results from all of its marketed medicines. In general, GSK pledged to post study results for approved drugs within 10 months of the trial's completion.

The settlement “holds GSK to a new standard of disclosure” that will “set an example for the entire pharmaceutical industry,” Spitzer's office crowed in a 26 August announcement. GSK noted in a terse statement that it paid the \$2.5 million simply “to avoid the high costs and time required to defend” against Spitzer's charges, and that it was releasing clinical data “voluntarily ... in response to public concern.”

—ELIOT MARSHALL