

“Cutting and edgy” – communicating research with societal dimensions in science centre contexts

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This session addresses the increasing role of science centres as places to communicate, discuss and raise awareness of contemporary science research that has implications beyond science itself, particularly where it has environmental and societal implications. While science centres have traditionally focussed on phenomena long known to science – mainly fundamental physics and chemistry – centres are increasingly playing a larger role communicating frontier research and scientific issues that are intertwined with human health, the environment, politics, social justice and so on. Numerous theorists and practitioners have promoted this as a key role – even a responsibility – for science centres.

The science of energy production and its links to climate change are a prime example. This session will share several novel (and quite exciting!) science show demonstrations and pieces of bespoke equipment that help communicate the science and issues around energy production, and also show how classic show demonstrations can be reframed to communicate the science and issues around energy production along with the underlying fundamental physics and chemistry. It will also share research assessing the impact of similar energy/climate shows. The session will be part sharing of approaches that other centres may want to adapt, and part discussion of science centre’s wider role in this area.

Depending on format length, the session could be extended to also take in research on and demonstrations from an HIV AIDS science show as part of a health intervention run in a science centre in South Africa.