

Opening Ceremony of the Exhibition “Discoveries 2010: Energy”

Rachel
Carson
Center

May 22, 2010

Mainau Island, Lake Constance, Germany

Event sponsored by The Rachel Carson Center, The Deutsches Museum, and The Federal Ministry of Education and Research

Event organizers: Helmuth Trischler, Stefan Esselborn, Felix Mauch

The Rachel Carson Center (RCC), in conjunction with the Deutsches Museum, has premiered its first public exhibition as part of the “Discoveries 2010: Energy” exhibition currently taking place on Mainau Island. The year 2010 has been designated the “Year of Energy” by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The tradition of defining each year anew as the year of a specific field of science (and technology) dates back to the turn of the millennium when the German government launched the Public Understanding of Science and the Humanities campaign (PUSH) in collaboration with major research institutions such as the Max Planck Society, the Fraunhofer Society, and in particular, the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft. PUSH aims at fostering the dialogue between science and society, as well as stimulating awareness of the importance of science as the foundation of modern culture, with its infinite stream of new knowledge and innovation. Each “year of science” sees the launch of both hundreds of local initiatives which correspond to that year’s topic and also some central events.

One of the highlights, if not *the* highlight, of the “Year of Energy” is the exhibition “Discoveries 2010: Energy,” which is on display on Mainau Island on Lake Constance from May 20 to August 29, 2010. Known as the “Flower Island,” Mainau is not only popular with tourists and a favorite spot for day trips, but is also known as a historic site for the environmental movement. In 1961 Count Lenart Bernadotte, the owner of the island, formulated the “Mainau Green Charter” as a public manifesto for nature protection and environmental resource management, anticipating what has later been termed sustainability. Since then, Mainau has been developed by the Bernadotte family as a kind of ecological paradise, showcasing the beauty of nature. In 2009, the Bernadotte family, in collaboration with “The Nobel Laureate Meetings at Lindau,” was able to present a small exhibition on the overarching theme of water. This exhibition was primarily financed by the Federal Ministry of

Education and Research under the auspices of Annette Schavan, the Federal Minister of Education and Research.

Learning from the experience gained from this exhibition, the planning for this year's exhibition on energy started earlier and was larger in scale and ambition. In October 2009, the Federal Ministry asked Helmuth Trischler in his dual function as Head of Research at the Deutsches Museum and Co-Director of the Rachel Carson Center to join the scientific advisory board of the exhibition. After a first meeting in the Ministry in Bonn, it became clear that this was an offer from our generous sponsor (the Federal Ministry of Education and Research) that the Rachel Carson Center couldn't refuse – the chance to be involved not only in an advisory capacity on matters related to the exhibition, but also actively engaging in its implementation. As a result, the Center started on its mission to promote its research in public exhibitions rather earlier than originally intended (the first exhibitions from the RCC were originally planned for 2013). So, the Center and the Deutsches Museum joined forces and took on responsibility for the first pavilion of the overall exhibition. This pavilion displays the changes in energy production and consumption from the “wooden age” to the present.

In October 2009, a small team consisting of five people started to conceptualize the exhibit: Nina Möllers (head of the research project “Objects of Energy Consumption” at the Deutsches Museum and associated with the RCC in her role as its curator), Frank Dittmann (Curator of Energy at the Museum), the RCC Research Associates Stefan Esselborn and Felix Mauch, and Helmuth Trischler. Not to be forgotten is Marc Landry who translated the information panels into English; a further Research Associate, Martin Bemann, joined the team in January. An ideal match of enthusiasm and creativity, coupled with museum experience, allowed this highly motivated team to meet tough deadlines and create the pavilion on time.

On Saturday, May 22, 2010, Minister Annette Schavan opened the exhibition. It had been pouring rain all week long and people in Germany hadn't experienced a day of clear skies for weeks. But this Saturday was a glorious day - Mainau showed off all of its beauty in the wonderful weather conditions, and the power generators producing photovoltaic energy were working at full speed. Dozens of press photographers were able to take marvelous pictures, and all of the visitors were infected by the brilliant mood of Minister Schavan who spent no less than two full hours taking in the exhibition. Her tour started at the RCC/DM pavilion and Helmuth Trischler used this opportunity not only to explain the concept of the exhibit but also to thank her personally for the generous funding of the RCC.

Now, what is on display at the RCC/DM pavilion? The exhibition uses a historical approach to illustrate regime changes in energy production and energy consumption since the early days of industrialization: the Wooden Age, the Century of Coal, the High Energy Society, and the “Return of Finiteness” in contemporary times. To come to a better understanding of sustainability, which is the overarching goal of the exhibition, a long term perspective is needed, and this overview is provided by the RCC/DM pavilion. In addition, the pavilion emphasizes the viewpoint of consumption - the significance of users and their patterns of consuming energy. Finally, it shows the importance of individual scientific spirit and technical creativity on the one hand, and the embeddedness of the individual into societal structures and large socio-technical systems on the other.

We would like to thank all members of the exhibition team for their great efforts, in particular Stefan Esselborn and Felix Mauch, who informally took the lead and made this project into such a great success.

Helmuth Trischler