

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Space Culture – Public Engagement in Space through Culture (9)

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ASTRONOMY AND CULTURE: THE LASTING IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL IAU100
NAMEEXOWORLDS PROJECT

Abstract

In 2019, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) celebrated its 100th anniversary. The IAU's mission is to promote and safeguard astronomy in all its aspects, including research, communication, education and development, through international cooperation. The organisation has over 13,500 members who are active in professional research, education and outreach in astronomy. To commemorate this centenary milestone, the IAU organised a year-long celebration (IAU100) to increase awareness of a century of astronomical discoveries and to support the use of astronomy as a tool for education, development and diplomacy under the central theme "Under One Sky". Throughout 2019 and early 2020, over 5000 activities for IAU100 have taken place at local, regional, national and global scales in over 140 countries.

This paper will highlight the outcomes of one of the most impactful IAU100 global projects: IAU100 NameExoWorlds. This initiative sought to contribute to the fraternity of all people with a significant token of global identity by providing the opportunity to all countries in the world to name one exoplanet and its host star through the coordination of national contests. In December 2019 the names of 112 sets of exoplanets and host stars' names were announced at a press conference in Paris. This is only the second time in history that a public campaign has led to the naming of stars and exoplanets. 360 000 proposals for names were received worldwide, and over 420 000 people voted for their preferred candidates.

This paper will explore the connection between astronomy and culture as demonstrated by the outcome of the IAU100 NameExoWorlds global project. The project's implementation will be discussed, with particular focus on the characteristics and common themes of the selected names from the competition, as each chosen name holds a clear cultural connection to each respective country. As many of the selected names are of indigenous etymology in recognition of the UN 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, the cultural connections to the sky and astronomy in indigenous etymology will be discussed. Lessons learned, recommendations, and the lasting impact of the project will also be explored.