

The role of education and outreach at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings: is science being used enough?

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Abstract

The Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1959, recognizes the Antarctic Treaty area as a region for peaceful purposes, promoting international scientific cooperation and environmental protection. Fostering education and outreach on the Antarctic region is important to inform stakeholders of the relevance of region, such as allowing scientific and educational awareness of this fragile environment, environmental stewardship, climate change education, historical/cultural significance, policy and advocacy, public engagement and inspire future generations while promoting international, interdisciplinary and

collaborative research. In order to assess the relevance of education and outreach (E&O) activities about the Antarctic Treaty, recognized at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCM) and its Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP), we examine I) the amount of the number of ATCM papers submitted on E&O since 1961, II) the key topics and the target audiences detailed in papers submitted to the ATCM on E&O and III) potential challenges on E & O in the future at the ATCMs. Since the Antarctic Treaty was signed, a total of 216 ATCM papers on E&O have been produced. The number of papers has increased substantially since the mid-1990s. "Science" (76.9%) and "Wildlife/Biodiversity/Environment" (75.5%) were the most addressed topics in these papers, while "Public" (81.0%) and those attending "Schools" (69.0%) are the main target audiences. "Science" in ATCM papers increased c. 120-fold from 1961-1997 to 2015-2023, while ATCM papers discussing engagement with the "Public" increased c. 40-fold during the same period. "Climate change" was first mentioned in 2006 and the number of papers per year increased 4-fold by 2015-2023. This study shows increasing interest in E&O through time, addressing key topics to relevant audiences related to the Antarctic region. Emerging topics (e.g., Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) and the engagement of early career professionals and educators should be made a priority.