

“Santander es Luz”

International Day of Light in Spain

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Abstract: Last years' International Day of Light activities in Spain were affected by the measures to avoid outbreaks of COVID-19. The city of Santander celebrated the date in October with an impressive lightpainting event. © 2021 The Author(s)

1. International Day of Light – Santander es Luz 2020

The Physics Institute of Cantabria (IFCA) organized on Friday 9 October 2020 a scientific, cultural and artistic event with the collaboration of the city of Santander to highlighting the role of light in science, art and education. This Project, funded by the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT - Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities) was called 'Santander is light' and included a 'lightmob' and eight workshops on the applications of light in research. In the end, Santander es Luz was a scientific, cultural and artistic free event for the general public that took place in the city center.

The International Day of Light covers all aspects that have to do with light in the most general sense, including art, culture or sustainable development. Last year, all the events planned on the official date (16th May) in Spain could not be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the actions in Santander were only postponed. Together with artists, production and institutions, IFCA decided to go on with the event, developed with the artistic technique of LightPainting, the art of painting with light using a long exposure photographic technique.

The Institute of Physics of Cantabria is a Joint Center based in Santander born out of the combined effort of two institutions: Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) and University of Cantabria (UC). It is oriented to perform research on basic science to understand the components of Nature: from elementary particles (Particle Physics) to the largest structures of the Universe (Astronomy and Space Science) as well as the complex collective behaviour of matter (Statistical and Non-linear Physics). The Outreach & Education team planned in advance this event of citizen science.

The scientific framework programmed by IFCA, together with the Photonics Group of the university, included several workshops to learn about optics, light, its composition and some technological tools. The set-up of the workshops ranged from the first photograph of the Universe to the use of light to check if our food is edible. The audience was able to enjoy and learn about different scientific applications of light, listening to the researchers in activities titled "Laser Graffiti", "Illuminating Particles of Space" or "My drink is a flashlight". All of them were free although, since capacity was limited, required prior registration.

2. COVID-19 measures

The Councilor for Tourism, Commerce, Markets and Institutional Relations in Santander confirmed this action would "show we are ready to continue carrying out cultural programming in a safe way". During the event, sanitary measures were maximum in order to guarantee the safety of the attendees, with a production defined in detail.

Prior to the event, there was constant communication between the organization and the City Council staff via meetings, prospecting visits and the study of protocols to follow in order to maintain the event's security measures, both at health level as well as citizen protection. The organization also requested permission from the General Directorate of Public Health. The access to the square was controlled and only possible through prior registration, and citizen participation was counted on and based on the area occupied. As for the Lightmob and the artistic work, starting at 8:00 p.m. and taking advantage of the nightfall, was limited to 150 attendees.

3. Results

Santander es Luz was a unique event in Spain that took on a special meaning in moments when we all needed that light and hope. The central work was created and directed by the artistic group Children Of Dark Light and representatives of urban art from different Spanish cities, and IFCA counted with the support of the Spanish Comitee of the International Day of Light.

The final result was a spectacular unique artistic-scientific work, an image of Mother Science created with light, crossing the surface of the main square of Santander. The figure launched a beam of white light from its heart, decomposed into a rainbow through a prism. This impressive design, made possible with a new Lightpainting technique, became animated. The 150 attendees were in charge of creating a rainbow by beating their colored lanterns. Photographs were taken for several minutes, where the attendees were the real actors and creators. It was a way of launching a message of encouragement among the entire population: Santander is Light!



4. References

Instituto de Física de Cantabria website: <https://ifca.unican.es/en-us/news/Paginas/Santander-s-Plaza-Porticada-becomes-a-centre-of-science-and-art.aspx>