

EuroPlaNet: Europe explores the Solar System

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Figure 1 – Europlanet logo

Abstract

EuroPlaNet was created in 2005 to bring together the European researchers working in planetary science by setting up an interdisciplinary European Planetary Science Network and this way achieving a long-term integration of this discipline in Europe. Due to the diversity of the researchers' skills involved in the project, EuroPlaNet provides an important European added value to the science produced by the European and international planetary missions. An integral part of EuroPlaNet is the Outreach Work Package which is described here.

EuroPlaNet is a project supported by the European Union (EU) and funded through the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) until the end of 2008.

Activities

There are seven so-called Work Packages:

- Activity N1: General management.
- Activity N2: Discipline working groups. The main objective of N2 is to find ways of maximising the science return from major European investments by developing synergies between the different types of activities within the fields of planetary sciences.
- Activity N3: Coordination of Earth-based and space observations — Consolidation of access by European planetary astronomers to telescope facilities in a variety of ways by the establishment of a global strategy for these observations, and, on this basis, of a “target” observation calendar, through a specific co-ordination working group.
- Activity N4: Developing an outreach strategy. Develop a pan-European outreach plan that will help European citizens associate with planetary exploration programme activities in Europe. N4 will develop and implement a plan for networking the outreach activities conducted by the different space agencies, research institutes, universities and science museums in Europe.

- Activity N5: Personnel exchange. Support of key exchanges of personnel between research groups developing co-operative programs in support of Cassini-Huygens (short-term visits), in order to establish a long-term working relation between groups, and produce a well-defined result for EuroPlaNet networking effort.
- Activity N6: Meetings, conferences. This Activity will organise one EuroPlaNet general meeting per year and one to two European Planetary Workshops during the project. It will monitor the overall consistency of all the more focused workshops organised by the other activities.
- Activity N7: Integrated and Distributed Information Service (IDIS). This activity will coordinate the studies for the implementation of an Integrated and Distributed Information Service (IDIS) and its further evolution into a European Virtual Planetary Observatory.

Outreach activities

The expected outcome of the Activity N4, as stated in its funding contract with the EU is:

It is expected that, as a result of this activity, European public awareness in Europe's involvement in the Planetary Space Exploration programme will be increased. This Activity will also help motivate all scientists participating in the consortium to invest a modest amount of their time in supporting a proper multi-lingual pan-European Outreach programme and to bring it to a level comparable to that existing in the USA.

The contract also declares that: *All participants in the Consortium will be invited to participate and to invest a small amount of their working time in this specific activity. Cultural exchanges may need to take place as active participation in outreach activities is not approached in similar ways in each EU country. Links with existing organisations that have established successful programmes will be encouraged.*

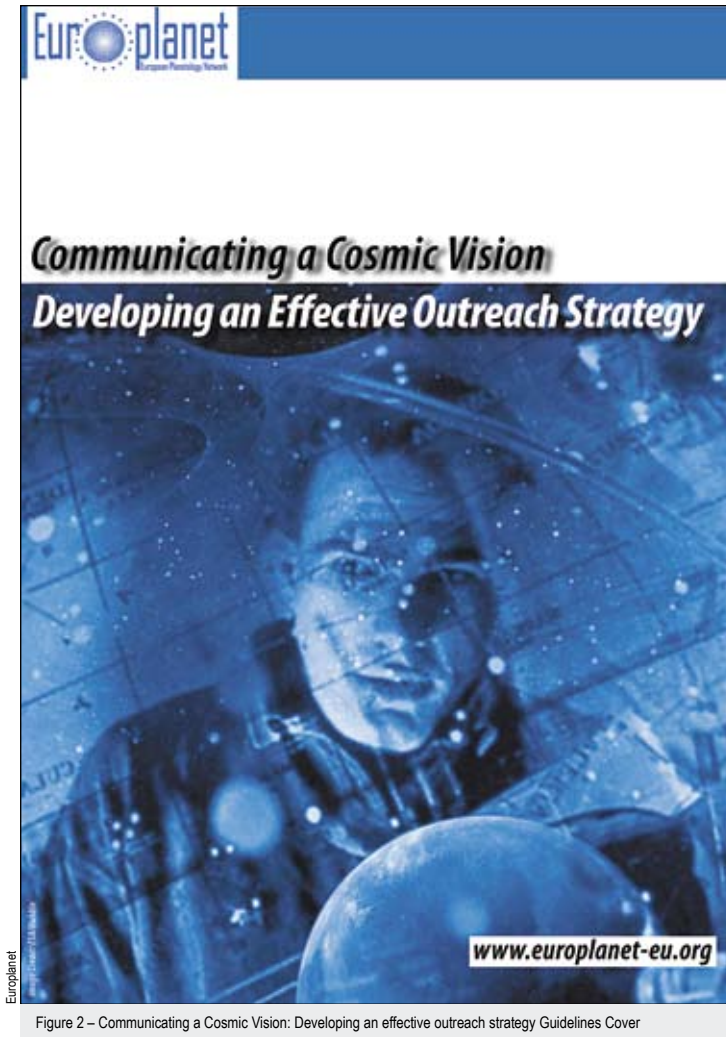
Outreach products and activities (2006-2007)

- EuroPlaNet Outreach website¹.
- Two institutional videos online².
- Best practice guide for science communication *Communicating a Cosmic Vision: Developing an effective outreach strategy*.
- Workshop in partnership with ESConet: *Communication Training for EuroPlaNet Researchers*.
- Events to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the launching of Sputnik — *2007: A very spatial year*.

An Outreach Steering Committee was established this year and presently contacts are being made to establish a network of National Points of Contact who will be responsible for the co-ordination of local and national activities. EuroPlaNet is now in the process of implementing an Outreach and Communications Strategy.

¹ www.europlanet-eu.org

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcEtDuGOMAQ> and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Bn_lhDXWSA



European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7)

Outreach activities are currently funded at a level of 10% of the overall FP6 EuroPlaNet budget. We will aim to increase this ratio within the EuroPlaNet FP7 proposal in order to be prepared to respond to one of the priorities expected to be put forward in the call for FP7 proposals planned to be issued in mid–November 2007. Indeed, it is anticipated that outreach activities will be a key component of the EuroPlaNet proposal for FP7.