

New Age of Exploration: A View from a Science Writer

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Abstract

We present an auxiliary frame for planetary science outreach, based especially on historical parallels and analogues. The general aim is to create and further cultivate a broader public support for integrated planetary exploration (i.e., one which uses both interplanetary probes/orbital observatories and ground instruments). The main approach consist of a series of a quite limited units of information, consisting of a unifying background narration and short stories illustrating specific points. These units could come in two versions, one emphasizing the visual side (static photos, static drawings, animations, videos), something as movie-like trailers for a wide use, including their upload to YouTube, the other emphasizing the narration itself in voice or textual form. These presentations should be scientifically rigorous, both factually and contextually, but will make use of “showbusiness” and “marketing” features, in a better sense of these terms. Both versions will support interactiveness.

The main point stressed is an extensive set of similarities between The Age of Exploration here on Earth (15th-19th century) on the one side and the present era of direct and indirect solar system exploration and a new dimension introduced by exoplanet discoveries on the other. The parallel/analogue approach is developed step by step, from early Portuguese explorers of the coast of West Africa (with mentions of ancient cases, represented, for example, by Phoenician and Greek colonisations of the Mediterranean. The consequences of the Age of Exploration benefited Europe enormously. The same could be expected form its modern space counterpart, as it has been demonstrated by a number of industrial outcomes from the Apollo Project. The relevant storytelling will highlight also mysteries and

riddles (preserving science approach), like martian methane and probable ocean on Europa. The information units will be oriented towards the members of public, but keeping in mind psychology and daily routine of various decision makers within the industry and the social life, including the politics. This part will be a synthesis of the literature about the subject and personal experiences in two new EU members. These are, of course, not typical examples of the situation within the developed world but still do offer some instructive points.