

10 Years of Developing Outreach Techniques and Best Practice by the Hellenic Amateur Astronomy Association

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Abstract

After 10 years of experience in outreach, the Hellenic Amateur Astronomy Association (HAAA) has developed a great number of outreach techniques and events. In order to support these activities, the HAAA studies carefully the environment in which outreach takes place, forms innovative bonds with other groups and professional astronomers and utilizes social media and services.

1. Introduction

The HAAA was established in 2003 in Athens, Greece, by a group of active amateur astronomers, whose aim was to examine the nature of the sky in order to form a deeper understanding of the solar system and the space beyond. The organisation is self-funded and run entirely by volunteers. Since one of the major goals of the HAAA is outreach, a series of activities has been held throughout the 10-year history of the association in order to engage public interest as well as simultaneously contribute to other events.

2. Target Groups and Cooperations

In order to successfully build a comprehensive outreach program, it is necessary to analyse and, in turn, understand the environment and the elements with which we want to connect. Such elements include the general public, schools and similar groups (e.g. scouts, humanitarian associations), university students, astrophiles, amateur astronomers and professional astronomers.

Moreover, the HAAA regularly collaborates with third-party organizations, even if their focus is not

typically astronomy-centred, in order to produce special events. Such groups are the Trekking Club of Pireaus, the Hackerspace.gr (dedicated to creative code and hardware hacking) and amateur photographers. Furthermore, there is a frequent interaction and cooperation between the HAAA and professional astronomers and scientists in promoting astronomy and planetary science.

3. Social Media & Services

The “Information Age” has enabled the HAAA to leverage a variety of modern tools, especially within the realm of social media, to inform, mobilize and keep in contact with the target groups mentioned above. It uses mailing lists for members of the association or astrophiles, an open facebook group, a facebook fan page with photo archives, online presentations, Youtube, a print journal (“Observational Astronomy”), an electronic newsletter (“Pleiades”) and its website. In addition, the HAAA has a library of astronomy books and magazines and astronomical equipment available to everyone. Whenever it is needed, the HAAA also invites the mass media to events of great importance.

4. Outreach Activities

Depending on the target group, there are various outreach activities that can take place. The fields of activity are: events at schools and similar groups, events open to the public, astro-meetings of the HAAA’s members (open to the public), astronomy lessons series, workshops of the HAAA’s observational sections, expeditions for astro-gazing and observations, “celestial hunting” (i.e. showing asteroids, comets or artificial satellites to schools and the public) and organisation or participation in

national star-parties, astronomical and other conferences and also, observational meetings. In almost all events, amongst other activities, there is a planetary observation with telescopes of the HAAA that inspires participants to engage with planetary science in a fun and interactive way.



Fig.1 One of the many outreach events organized by HAAA during the International Year of Astronomy in 2009.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The HAAA has formed innovative cooperations and has developed best-practice from a plethora of outreach activities which build bridges between the professional and amateur astronomy community and promote astronomy to the general public and other groups.