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FTP-Europlanet gUG – A Not-for Profit Enterprise to Support Astronomy and Planetary-Related Education

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Summary

In this talk, we will introduce FTP-Europlanet gUG, a not-for-profit organization established in Germany to support educational initiatives related to astronomy and planetary science. We will share experiences with setting up the company, describe current activities and give an update on future plans.

Background

FTP-Europlanet is a “gemeinnützige Unternehmersgesellschaft” (gUG), a non-profit entrepreneurial company founded with the aim of promoting scientific research and education, with a focus on astronomy.

The charitable aims of the company are to support:

- The promotion of astronomy, planetary science and space exploration across Europe;
- The promotion of the educational and outreach activities of the Faulkes Telescope Project and Europlanet;
- Teacher training and continuous professional development for STEM educators;
- Innovative delivery of STEM subjects in schools through astronomy and planetary sciences;
- Public engagement and outreach in astronomy and planetary sciences;
- Development of research and education projects using robotic astronomy;
- Promotion of diverse, inclusive education in a sustainable way;
- The provision of media services to the astronomy and space community and press office support;
- Engagement with amateur astronomers.

Incorporated in December 2020, FTP-Europlanet gUG grew out of a collaboration between Dr. Lothar Kurtze, an astronomy educator, alongside the Faulkes Telescope Project, a programme of the Dill Faulkes Educational Trust Ltd that offers schools free access to telescopes in the Las Cumbres Observatory global telescope network, and Europlanet’s outreach programme.

Current activities

FTP-Europlanet gUG is currently involved in two Erasmus+ projects:

- Clic-PoliT (Climate Action and Light Pollution Threat), led by Black Rock Observatory (Ireland), which runs from November 2021-October 2024. The project is working with upper primary and secondary schools to develop strategies to address energy consumption and light pollution and debate them with policymakers in a Students' Parliament.
- StAnD (StudentTs As plaNetary Defenders), led by INAF (Italy), which runs from September 2023 – August 2026). StAnD is an ambitious space science education project to involve school children in the search for asteroids and meteorites.

In addition, FTP-Europlanet gUG is currently involved in:

- Teacher training and creation of teaching materials in support of the Faulkes Telescope Project;
- Creation of materials for astronomy education and on-site technical support for organisations in Salzburg, including the VEGA Observatory, Haus der Natur and the Choros Concept GmbH;
- Astronomy-themed workshops in collaboration with the shipping company, Oceanwide Expeditions;
- Teacher training at the House of Astronomy in Heidelberg;
- Development and testing of observation programs together with schools in the Weinheim, Lampertheim, Münster, Salzburg and at other locations in Germany and Austria;
- Astronomical imagery for the project TerraVisaMusica.

The company also has a close relationship with the Haus der Astronomie in Heidelberg.

Future Plans

Through participation in Erasmus+ programmes, FTP-Europlanet has established a number of close collaborations with organisations involved in providing astronomy education across Europe. Collaborations with institutions like NUCLIO in Portugal, Ellinogermaniki Agogi in Greece, INAF in Turin, Italy, and BCO in Ireland exemplify our commitment to broadening educational outreach. Currently, the company is actively part of consortia that have submitted three further Erasmus+ bids, and along with partners, will continue to seek funding, expand resources and opportunities to develop astronomy and planetary-related resources and training for educators across Europe.

In the long-term, FTP-Europlanet gUG will also support sustainability for outreach, education and media resources built up through the Europlanet 2024 Research Infrastructure (RI) project (and previous EU investment) by providing a sustainable platform for Europlanet to participate in future funding calls, such as Horizon Europe, and providing training services for the community.

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