

ESConet Science Communication Workshop for IYA2009 Nodes: A Brief Report

**Organised by ESConet - European Science Communication Network and IYA2009 Secretariat
25 - 27 March 2009
Dubrovnik, Croatia**

Introduction

As our world grows ever more complex and the pace of scientific discovery and technological change quickens, the global community of professional astronomers needs to communicate more effectively with the public. This need and challenge is even more pressing now, when the world celebrates the 400th anniversary of the first use of the telescope by Galileo and the International Year of Astronomy 2009. With this in mind, ESConet - European Science Communication Network, kindly agreed to organise a science communication a special workshop for IYA2009 Nodes.

This workshop was designed to give SPoCs the skills and confidence to interact with the media, engage with ordinary citizens, and to advise and persuade policy-makers. It was held in the Centre for Advanced Academic Studies in the beautiful city of Dubrovnik on Croatia's Adriatic coast, from the 25th to the 27th of March 2009.

Workshop timetable (all sessions ~2 hours)

Day 1 - 25 March

Morning: Trainees arrived

Afternoon Introductions; Who are you communicating with and why?

Evening: Media writing: lecture; start practical

Day 2 - 26 March

Morning 1: Media writing practical

Morning 2: Talking to the media: lecture; feedback on press releases

Afternoon: Talking to media: interviews

Evening: Feedback on interviews; How the media cover science

Day 3 - 27 March

Morning 1: Public science on the web: lecture; start practical

Morning 2: Public science on the web: lecture; start practical

Afternoon: Feedback on web practical; Science in culture

Evening: Trainees departed

Overview of the modules

Basic science communication skills have very wide applicability, from scientific journals and conferences all the way through to giving talks to school students. ESConet Trainers make use of a

"scenario approach", in which the researchers to be trained are put into a number of situations in which they will be expected to communicate with lay, but intelligent, audiences. In particular, ESConet stresses the importance of communication with and through the mass media in order to provide basic training in structured and well-focussed communication. These basic science communication workshops consist of a number of modules, most of which have practical activities. Feedback sessions are built into all of the practical modules, and further feedback will be given as required, after the workshops.

Modules

1. Who are you communicating with and why?
2. Writing for the media
3. Talking to the media
4. Public science on the web
5. How the media cover science
6. Science in culture

List of participants

Muhamed Muminovic: muhamed_muminovic@yahoo.co.uk

Rebecca Barnes: rebecca.barnes@esa.int

Manolis Zoulias: mzoulias@academyofathens.gr

Ana Frade: aia2009@mat.uc.pt

Valeria Cappelli: valeria.cappelli@oapd.inaf.it

Anne-Lize Kochuyt: anne-lize.kochuyt@planetarium.be

Ricardo Cardoso Reis: ricreis@astro.up.pt

Michael Geffert: geffert@astro.uni-bonn.de

Oiliver Hainaut: ohainaut@eso.org

Raquel Shida: rshida@eso.org

Catalin Mosoia: catalin.mosoia@gmail.com

Darije Maricic: darije.maricic@zg.t-com.hr>

Feedback from participants

Michael Geffert, from Germany

The place of the workshop is clearly a first choice place, because being so near to the old city of Dubrovnik is a fantastic opportunity to visit the old town even if we have a dense structured programme.

I enjoy very much the contact to the other participants and I have a lot of nice meetings/discussions with people which I knew from the meeting in Vienna, or people, which I met for the first time. In my opinion we have the rare case, that the group of participants was growing very fast together and is now a real community!

Our workshop takes place under good conditions, which were set by a team of trainers, who have not only a sufficient competition. They are also clearly interested to be in good contact with the

trainees to have a successful workshop. It is also seen that the members of the team are collaborating and working in a good way together.

I will not say, that everything is new for me - as it will be also not new some of the participants. But I never had the opportunity to think about the way, how I could communicate science to the public and I never saw such complete ideas about the realisation of such communication. In addition the PowerPoint presentations, which will be given freely to the participants, are an ideal guideline for my plans to teach also students in Bonn to learn more about science communication. It was typical for this workshop: the team offered me immediately any help for that!

Finally I would say that I was glad, dropping my urgent work in Bonn for a while and attending the workshop here in Dubrovnik, because the contact to the other people involved in the year of astronomy (IYA2009) and the discussion about the progress of the IYA2009 in other countries was very important for me.

Darije Maricic from Croatia

The ESConet network in Dubrovnik was very useful for me. Very active and I learnt a lot about communication in science.

Once again thank you.

Steve Miller from the United Kingdom

It was a pleasure dealing with you and your colleagues from IYA. Your own dedication to communication was clear from the enthusiastic way you all worked on the exercises we gave you, and from the insightful contributions to our discussions. You left just in time - the weather here is appalling with torrential rain. Just as well everything is nearby!

Ricardo Cardoso Reis from Portugal

Although reaching Dubrovnik from Porto (Portugal) is not exactly easy (3 flights), the venue was no doubt carefully selected by ESConet so that trainees didn't lack anything. The accommodations were great, with internet available on every room, and on the same building as the workshop, so even in the cold Croatian days, we had no need to leave the building. And everything else was nearby, from places to eat, to post offices, supermarkets, banks, bus and taxi.

As for the workshop itself, the team was highly dedicated to us. Not only that, (as Prof. Steve Miller put it), we were "grilled" with practical work, right after some very clear and concise theory. In 2,5 days we learned things always had eluded most of us, very used to communicating science. It also

gave us a chance to work on some of our less developed skills. For example, I (finally) found out why my "100 hours of astronomy" national webpage (www.astro.up.pt/100horas) hasn't been that effective.

It was a chance to learn from the best, but also a chance to learn from each other, and to realize that some problems we face are universal, while others are very local and driven by our different cultures. We exchanged what works, suggested what might work, and came out with the notion that communicating isn't an exact science, so all we can do is our best. Now our best is a little better thanks to this workshop.

Manolis Zoulias from Greece

Thank you all from IYA2009 Secretariat for arranging with this. This has been a really useful course especially as regards to interviewing and press release preparation. Hands on team working was also a nice way to advance collaboration. During the commenting and discussion following the courses main lecture we exchanged views and ideas on science communication in general. An overall positive and useful experience.

I would like to point out - just to be 100% sincere and for your records - that the only drawback was transferring to Dubrovnik for most of us because of the lack of proper connections and high cost. Me and the rest of the participants comprehend the reasons and this could not spoil our definitely positive feeling of this.

During my stay here in Dubrovnik, I had a lot of fruitful discussions with many of the participants.

Catalin Mosoia from Romania

The workshop was one of the best I have attended. Informative and challenging. I have to mention the practical activity as one of the highlights of the workshop. I had very useful discussions with participants and hope we will keep contact and develop further projects.

Raquel Shida from ESO, germany

The workshop exceeded all my expectations. It was a great opportunity to learn from the ones who know about science communication and to exchange experiences with people who have been working for long in the field. The lectures and the practical activities were all very helpful and had everything to do with our routines and with the challenges we have to face in our daily lives. All was so exciting that even during the meals and strolls around the city we kept talking enthusiastically about astronomy outreach and the International Year of Astronomy.

The workshop taught us many small practical tricks, specially for when we need to interact with the media. Combined with the unscheduled social activities, it gave to many of us much more confidence to keep working in astronomy outreach and disseminating the IYA2009 to the general public.

I'd like to thank the organisers for preparing and presenting these interesting activities and providing us all the materials online. I'd also like to thank the IYA2009 Secretariat for taking the initiative to promote this wonderful experience!

Olivier Hainaut from ESO, Germany

The venue of this workshop was ideal: good lecture rooms with excellent equipment and facilities, suitable rooms for discussion, superb internet. The lodging was excellent, also with internet. The proximity to the (fascinating) old town provided infinite choice for food and exploration during the (limited) free time. The connection from Munich to Dubrovnik was acceptable.

The training itself had an excellent balance between theory, practice and feedback on the exercises. The balance between the 3 main topics (press release writing, radio interviews and web design) was good, and the level of the workshop was perfect for me (with some empirical public outreach experience, but almost no formal training). The theory lectures were fairly well structured and complete, with a good level of interactivity. In terms of quality of content, the web design one seemed a little weaker than to two others (more redundant, less deep). The practical exercises were perfect: topic chose carefully so that we could use our knowledge, motivating as they were directly related to our actual work. The teachers were fantastic at analysing the results and extracting the most interesting parts.

IYA2009 suggestions/comments

- Improve national nodes visibility
- Keeping the relationship between professional and amateurs astronomers
- Astronomy as a locomotive of science disciplines
- This is for the people working at the secretariat and for the organisers of activities: keep up the good work and don't get discouraged when small problems pop up here and there. The IYA2009 has been a great event, and all I hear from people from many countries is always very positive!

Photographs from the event



A photo collage from the workshops.
Credit: Catalin Mosoia, Romania



Three participants sharing information.
Credit: Catalin Mosoia, Romania



At a radio station in Dubrovnik
Credit: Raquel Shida.



Working during a session.
Credit: Raquel Shida.



The majority of participants in a group portrait.