

## **EDITORIAL**

Communicating is one of the basic processes of life.

As astronomers, we communicate all the time, with colleagues of course, but also with managers and administrators, with decision makers and takers, with social representatives, with the news media, and with the society at large including our family, our friends and amateur astronomers. Education is naturally part of the process.

And we communicate nowadays via a large variety of means: voice and print, phone and fax, as well as via the now omnipresent electronic tools, both active (e-mail) and passive (web), in addition to the various graphical arts including movies, videos, DVDs and so on.

A number of books and papers have already been devoted to science-related communication in general. Is communication of astronomy different from what it is in other communities? Basically not, with perhaps two significant differences though: the astronomy community is rather compact and well organized world-wide; astronomy has penetrated the general public remarkably well with an extensive network of associations and organizations of aficionados all over the world.

Accessorily, as a result of the huge amount of data accumulated, but also by necessity for their extensive international collaborations, astronomers have been pioneering the development of distributed resources, electronic communications and networks coupled to advanced methodologies and technologies often much before they become of common world-wide usage.

Most astronomers have never been trained to communicate optimally, either orally (*e.g.* professional communications and lobbying), in writing (*e.g.* professional ‘papers’) or graphically (*e.g.* web sites). Dealing adequately with the news media can be a perilous exercise, not only for the individuals involved, but also, beyond them, for their institutions and even for the whole astronomy community itself.

This book is filling a gap in the astronomy-related literature by providing a set of chapters not only of direct interest to astronomy communication, but also well beyond it.

The book starts with an introduction by C. Madsen & R.M. West to the problematics of public communication of astronomy, followed by a chapter by S.P. Maran and collaborators sharing their experience from a large professional society, the *American Astronomical Society*. P. Catapano *et al.* then describe the more general rôle, mission and activities of the *Public Communication of Science and Technology* network.

On to media matters, R. Taylor comments the context of science on television, while N. Henbest concentrates more on astronomy on television. Follows then a well-documented chapter by C. Madsen on astronomy in the European print media.

Moving to public outreach and education, A. Fraknoi describes the historically long and intense activity in the field by the *Astronomical Society of the Pacific*, while I. Griffin details what is done around a flagship of the astronomy fleet, the *Hubble Space Telescope*.

Follow then three more education-centered chapters: C. Risjdijk illustrates the varied educational programs by the *South African Astronomical Observatory*, while F. Wagner & R.M. Ros on one hand, and A. Bacher on the other hand, show different aspects of astronomy education and promotion among European school teachers.

The book ends with a chapter by A. Heck describing the multi-faceted intra-professional communication, followed by experienced-based recommendations from *Nature* Editor L. Sage on how to write a clear and engaging paper.

It has been a privilege and a great honor to be given the opportunity of compiling this book and interacting with the various contributors. The quality of the authors, the scope of experiences they cover, the messages they convey make of this book a unique contribution to the field.

The reader will certainly enjoy as much as we did going through such a variety of well-inspired chapters from so many different horizons, be it also because the contributors have done their best to write in a way understandable to readers not necessarily hyperspecialized in astronomy while providing specific detailed information, as well as plenty of pointers and bibliographical elements.

We are specially grateful to H.A. Abt for writing the foreword of this book and to the various referees who ensured independent and prompt reading of the contributions. Finally, it is a very pleasant duty to pay tribute here to the various people at *Kluwer Academic Publishers* who quickly understood the interest of such a volume and enthusiastically agreed to produce it.

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