



The right to the night sky in punitive enclosure context

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Abstract. The “Right to the night sky” outreach project holds astronomy workshops for children and teens deprived of their liberty in juvenile detention centers. It is carried out by an interdisciplinary group of students, graduates, and teachers of Astronomy, Geophysics, Educational Science, Law, Psychology, Social Work, and Social Communication. It’s has been accredited and recognized by the Faculty of Astronomical and Geophysical Sciences, and the National University of La Plata (Argentina) since the year 2014. This work presents the diverse activities developed in the project, the methodologies used, and an analysis of how the project evolved, grew, and expanded over time, continuing what has already been presented by [Charalambous et al. \(2014\)](#) and [Haack et al. \(2019\)](#)

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1. Introduction

The project started as an informal proposal in 2013. Students and teachers of Astronomy, Law, Education Science and Social Work gave astronomy workshops to the teens living in Araoz Alfaro closed center, under the approval of the institution directors at the time. After this experience, a request was raised by several institutions in the area to repeat the experience. Therefore, in 2014, the education proposal evolved into an outreach project that could satisfy this demand and sustain itself in time. At present, it remains an outreach project of the Astronomy and Geophysics Faculty, part of the National University of La Plata. As team members change over time, and so the different disciplines involved, the educational proposal continues to improve and evolve, along with our formation as educators in the particular territory of punitive institutions.

2. Overview

The proposal is based on the human right to education and recreation, declared in various international, national, and regional legislations. These laws protect and promote their access, even for people deprived of their liberty, and emphasize their protection for children and teens. Imprisonment sentences should not affect these rights, especially

when the local juvenile penal regime conceives prison confinement as a social-educative measure. Yet, these rights are not fully satisfied inside the punitive institutions for youths (see Daroqui *et al.* 2012).

The project intervenes in the Partido of La Plata, the epicenter of the juvenile detention institutes of the region. The access to the observation of the night sky it's almost null for the youths imprisoned there, as the cells on the vast majority of these establishments do not possess windows that allow the view of the sky and, even though in these institutions outdoor activities are allowed and nighttime activities are not explicitly forbidden, they are scarce, mainly because the night is often associated with "danger" or "insecurity".

On this basis, the project's main goal is to strengthen the access to the fundamental rights of education, recreation, and bonding with the night sky, of the children and teens deprived of their liberty. The proposal seeks to produce an educative and recreational environment where freedom of speech and creativity is encouraged; to reinforce the youths' astronomy knowledge, retrieving their previous education; to promote the youths' right to bond with the night sky, reinforcing the identity relationship person-landscape; and to reflect on the living regime of the institutions. To enhance the educational proposal communication channels are established with the teachers and psycho-social team of the institutions, also helping on the project's continuity over time.

3. Methods

To produce a working environment that supports the goals of the projects, we utilize hands-on workshops. This method favors the active participation of the subjects, conjugating the context and knowledge involved in a learning process that results from the exchange between the participants towards the collective construction of wisdom. The hands-on approach creates a relaxed setting, that enables not only participation but also dialog. We understand dialog as an "encounter" where knowledge and action are combined, contributing to -in our case- the democratization of astronomical knowledge. Moreover, the dialog produces a trusting climate between the subjects, which is encouraged by the conformation of a horizontal relationship between the participants and the members of the project, making it possible to bring out personal experiences, thoughts, and ideas of the subjects involved.

At present time, there are four thematic workshops (Cardinal Points, Moon, Solar System, and Space Technology) grouped under a cycle, that we offer for a group of 15 to 20 participants. Each themed workshop has its corresponding planning, they are linked with each other and follow an order. Each one has a "classroom moment" of indoor activities, and an outdoor night sky astronomical observation, where we use a telescope, binoculars or just observe with the naked eye.

The workshops take place every 15 days thus, we work for two months with the same group of youths. After that, for closure, we organize along with the directors of the institution a daytime visit to La Plata Observatory and Planetarium, where we have a guided tour, watch a function, have outdoor activities in the green area of the Observatory and, if the weather allows it, we conclude with a solar observation.

References

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