

School Workshops on Astronomy

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Abstract. Do you want to know how to make students volunteer to stay all night long watching the stars with their telescopes freezing? Or how to inspire decent adults to prepare a 'queue-list to Jupiter', wait for their turn for hours, and control that no one approaches the telescope bypassing the line? Or how to attract people of all age to forget their laziness and duties, and to get up at 3 a.m. to watch the transit of Venus? If your answer is 'yes', then come and see what can be done at the School Workshops on Astronomy.

Keywords. Public Outreach, Education

The outreach programme School Workshops on Astronomy† (SWA) is held at the Orle Mountain Station in the Izera Dark-Sky Park‡ in Poland every spring and autumn since 2009. These Workshops started as a few-days-long event addressed to the secondary and high-school pupils but soon enriched their offer by giving the pupils an opportunity to participate in various current astronomical events.

SWA have been already attended by around 300 pupils many of whom took part in those Workshops more than once. So far, each edition of SWA has been different. Our programme includes events like exhibitions, observations of the Moon, the stars, the Sun, and the atmospheric phenomena, talks given by the scientists and by pupils, courses of astrophotography and orientation on the sky, practical exercises, scientific measurements, discussions, and documentaries. The pupils learn how to measure the darkness, how to prepare the site to building a copy of an ancient observatory there, how to prepare themselves for a trip to Mars, how to work in a group and to present the results of their work in a concise and interesting way.

As a part of their activities, SWA participated in the opening of the Planetary Path in the Izera Mountains in 2010 and their representatives were invited to the Astronomers' Ball at the Royal Observatory Greenwich in 2011. In the frame of SWA, we organized watching the Transit of Venus in 2012 and several other public astronomical activities.

As a result, SWA have attracted enough interest of the media to be mentioned in the regional press and TV, and at different Polish and international web sites. This initiative without doubt belongs to the public astronomical highlights in the region of the Lower Silesia in Poland and the enthusiastic reception of each edition of the Workshops make us believe that this programme is a good case study for showing how to attract the general public to astronomy.

Acknowledgements

J. M-Ż acknowledges the Polish Ministry grant NN203 405139 and the IAU grant GA 1041.

† <http://www.swa.edu.pl>
‡ <http://www.izera-darksky.eu>