

A mid-size city and IYA09 : a case study

Abstract : Liège is a mid-size Belgian city, but it has a big university with a renowned astrophysics & geophysics institute and a dynamic amateur society. Despite not being a capital city, it was decided to put emphasis on the IYA09 opportunity, especially for reaching as many people as possible. Both "usual" activities (i.e. for those already interested in science) and "unusual" events (i.e. for a public rarely meeting science) were thus organized, with a good success. We review here these activities, with their up's and down's, as a legacy for future events.

Liège :

- Located to the east of Belgium near Netherlands, Luxembourg and Germany, it has ~ 200 000 inhabitants (600 000 with suburbs).
- University of Liège : 17 000 students (>3000 foreign, 90 nationalities) - www.ulg.ac.be



Two special actors at the University :

- **Réjouissances**, the science diffusion cell www.ulg.ac.be/sciences (helps organizing popular science events)
- **Maison de la Science**, the university science museum www.masc.ulg.ac.be
- A strong tradition in astronomy :
 - A 125-yrs old **Department of Astrophysics**, counting now ~90 astronomers. It has played a strong historic role in the foundation of ESA, ESO,... and is the sole Belgian department to offer a master in astrophysics (incl. planetary sciences) - www.ago.ulg.ac.be
 - A 72-yrs old local amateur society called "**SAL**" – very active with ~600 members, it is the largest group in the French-speaking part. www.societeastronomiquedeliege.be

A very large popular talk :

- "Grandes Conférences Liégeoises" organizes large popular talks, on various subjects but rarely astronomy...
- With our collaboration, they invited Trinh Xuan Thuan to talk about our Universe : 1400 people attended, which was a big success for them and the largest IYA09 popular talk in Belgium !



Infos for teachers and pupils :

- A small leaflet presenting the bases of astronomy (seasons, lunar phases, our Solar system, stars and rockets) was edited. It has clear and simple text, experiments requiring no special material (only flashlights and oranges), as well as summarizing questions. It was made available to the teachers, the pupils, and the public at the printing costs (5€ for 60p in colors).
- 1000 copies were edited, and are now all gone. A new edition is foreseen. **If you wish to translate it in your own language, it is not a problem, just contact us !**



Exhibits :

- **on telescopes** (3 months, free) : the history of these optics instruments, the current instruments, and the way these devices work were presented through colourful panels, historic pieces, scale models, and hands-on experiments. There were associated workshops for schools (1800 pupils) and guided tours (800 pupils). **This exhibit can travel without problems, don't hesitate to contact us !**
- **Foucault pendulum** (2 weeks, entrance fee 2 or 3€, contest to win one galileoscope every day) : 2500 people (half = schools) saw the Earth moving, discover Foucault's work and the bases of astronomy.



Standard activities, also in 2009 :

- AGO Department
 - **Astro-news** : short summaries in French of the astro press releases, provided to the public and the media (~600 this year).
 - **Astro-training** to discover the astronomer's job for a few pupils (typ. < 10) in their final year of secondary school.
 - **Planetarium shows** in our small planetarium (600 students during the week and 250 laymen during the week-ends).
 - **Science fair** "Printemps des Sciences" with astro-workshops for primary schools (250 pupils) and celestial animations for secondary schools (165 pupils) and the public at large (3000 people during the week-end).
 - **Space week**, or "meet the astronauts" (~600 people).
- SAL
 - **popular astro-talks** (9 or 10/year) : ~1100 people
This year with a specific "Galilean" cycle...
 - **introductory astronomy courses** (7/year) : ~600 people
 - **open doors at the old Observatory** (2/year) : ~700 people

There was some "IYA09 effect" for the talks but rather limited. Note that the events are spread all over the year.



Art & Science :

- The Liège Philharmonic Orchestra accepted to play the "Planets" symphony for their season opening ! There were 3 **concerts** : one in Brussels, two in Liège - one with a special multimedia projection (with > 500 people)... The programme given to each spectator also contained some astronomical information on planets ; in addition, a small exhibition (on planets, real meteorites, and our Earth's evolution) lasted one month, during which there was a very popular "open door day", with hundreds of visitors.
- The university theater company (TURLg) accepted to create a **theater** play on Galileo and the philosophical side of science. It was attended by about 200 people.

Conclusions and lessons learned :

- In total, the University and the amateur society have brought astronomy to about 13 000 people in 2009, which is a clear increase over previous years – there was an IYA09 effect, especially for the "unusual" events.
- Despite the fact that Liège is not a capital city but only a mid-size city, many events (concert, play, exhibits) could be organized... Why?
 - Good-will astronomers (professional and amateurs) are deeply needed...
 - Collaborations are crucial, especially for non-conventional events (e.g. art) and for the logistics of big events...
 - Know your region – Where is everybody during week-ends or evenings ? What is the best time ? What is popular in your neighbourhood (festival, special events or services,...) and can it be tuned to astronomy (answer is : Certainly !)?