



Il Colle di
Galileo

EU-Universe Awareness (UNAWE) Project Managers meeting

Villa Il Gioiello, Arcetri, Florence

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Abstract. Villa Il Gioiello was the perfect site to host the National Project Managers meeting of the EU-UNAWE project, an EU-funded project in which the INAF–Arcetri Astrophysical Observatory is a partner. The project aims to educate young children in astronomy – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – mainly by promoting teacher training and producing inspiring materials for both teachers and young students (www.unawe.org).

Keywords. Science Education, Teacher training, Children.

EU-UNAWE (European Universe Awareness) is an educational project supported by the European Commission under 7th FP (Space) and builds on UNAWE, a successful cornerstone project of the International Year of Astronomy 2009. Its vision is to use the beauty and grandeur of the Universe to inspire young children and encourage them to develop an interest in science and technology. Until the advent of UNAWE, there were no large scale attempts to use astronomy as a tool for inspiring and educating young and very young children. Therefore, while the project resources are open to all, the program is aimed at children aged 4 to 10 years, especially those from underprivileged communities. A child's early years are widely regarded to be the most important for development and education. The idea behind EU-UNAWE is to educate children in astronomy, because it embodies a unique combination of scientific and cultural aspects. The project aims at creating a huge international network of teachers and educators, at directly training them and at producing new and innovative resources for educating and inspiring the young generations.

From October 10 to 12 the third meeting of the EU-UNAWE project National Managers took place in Florence, at the Villa il Gioiello. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss and share activities and progress to date and decide about key issues and activities to be carried out in the near future (e.g. evaluation of the activities).

The project goals that were discussed were largely concerned with: teacher training sessions planned in the participating countries – with the specific characteristics related to the local educational situations – and the innovative educational resources designed and developed within the framework of the project.

Apart from discussions on practical matters such as budgetary issues, organizational aspects and the dates of the next International Conference (to be held in Heidelberg, October 2013), the “Villa il Gioiello” meeting inspired some very interesting and useful debates. The participants talked about the relevance of the educational activities designed and proposed by the different partners, in relation to their national curricula and the possible connections with other curricular subjects such as sciences, foreign languages, national language and literature, the arts, geography, math, social studies and so on. Astronomy in fact provides a context for many other curricular activities.

Furthermore, there was also a fundamental discussion about the evaluation of the project, a key matter both for the European Commission evaluators and for the progress of the project. The participants agreed on the general concept of the evaluation and also on country-specific activities to take account of the different local situations, needs and didactic approaches. An entire working session was devoted to developing concrete ideas about how to evaluate the numerous, different materials developed in all the participating countries.

The meeting was attended by 16 astronomers and experts in education from the six countries participating in the European project (Holland, UK, Germany, Italy, Spain and South Africa) and also the Sri Lanka UNawe manager .

More information about the project, updates and educational materials can be found at www.unawe.org.



Fig. 1. A session in the conference hall on the first floor of Villa Il Gioiello.