

Portuguese Language Expertise Center for the OAD

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Abstract. Supporting the use of astronomy as a tool for development in specific regions and languages, the International Astronomical Union's (IAU) Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD) has established a Portuguese 'Language Expertise Centre for the OAD' (PLOAD), hosted at Núcleo Interactivo de Astronomia (NUCLIO), in collaboration with the Institute of Astrophysics and Space Sciences (IA) in Portugal. The centre is one of the new coordinating offices announced at the IAU General Assembly in Honolulu, Hawaii on 13 August 2015.

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"The office in Portugal will be the first of the OAD's regional coordination offices to focus exclusively on a particular language. The Portuguese language region is an important global community with a strong connection across several borders - the LOAD will maximise on this in order to realise astronomy-for-development ambitions" says Kevin Govender, director of OAD. The president of NUCLIO, Rosa Doran, adds "The LOAD will be essential to build bridges between the diverse stakeholders in the different member countries. Members already committed are very hopeful that this will be a strong partnership that will open a variety of opportunities for country members and a privileged place to exchange best practices. NUCLIO will be the first coordinator and we hope to design an effective road map to help strengthen communication among countries and set the example for other similar initiatives in the future." João Retrê of IA adds "This is an excellent opportunity for Portuguese speaking countries around the world to work together developing resources, sharing ideas despite the borders and the cultural differences. The Instituto de Astrofísica e Ciências do Espaço will support the LOAD to fulfil its goals and vision."

The Portuguese-speaking countries are the home for more than 240 million people located across the globe, having cultural similarities and a shared history. Many children in some of these countries are out-of-school youth and the overall communities are scarce in technological resources, particularly in Africa and South America. Despite the natural wealth of some of these nations there is an urgent need for capacity building and improvement of competence profiles.

The vision of the PLOAD is to establish a strong collaborative network across the Portuguese speaking community, from countries where Portuguese is the national language and from other Portuguese speaking communities established across the world. The main objective is to empower these countries, communities and groups with the necessary tools

to build their own local support structures and development goals on Astronomy and Space.

The PLOAD mission will be to fulfil its vision by following the guidelines of the IAU strategic plan and build on existing challenges and opportunities towards strong collaborative and active structures. This mission will be accomplished by several steps, starting from a careful research of resources and existing needs and design an effective implementation strategy of aid and support.

The following steps are foreseen:

- Establish solid online connections in each Portuguese speaking countries' teaching communities;
- Make curricula assessment and recommendations for improvements, understanding the already established importance of astronomy on each country in a comprehensive guide and promote science cross-curricular linkage to other fields of learning such as relevant cultural references and cultural importance of the sky in language and history;
- Promote online teacher training workshops supported and enhanced by the already existing networks of international non-profit organizations such as Galileo Teacher Training Program (www.galileoteachers.org) and Universe Awareness (www.unawe.org) as well as to support face-to-face teacher trainings;
- Promote scientific literacy by exploring online free tools and resources and in close collaboration with each of the local contact points understand the material needs of the communities and find appropriate funding to provide technological resources to these communities;
- Support student's exchange between universities within the participant countries according to existing expertise and needs;
- Build-in partnership with Portuguese speaking universities via online learning opportunities by exploring the MOOC concept;
- Promote job opportunities between researchers and research centers and local industries, by fostering internships in the institutions;
- Start collaboration with local entities for the development of research infrastructures, using national and international congress, meetings and other alike opportunities to make local stakeholders aware of the potential of astronomy for the development of the communities;
- Promote global initiatives to engage the general public in astronomy outreach activities and to promote intercultural exchanges between the different Portuguese speaking countries using global initiatives such as Global Astronomy Month, the Earth Hour, the Portuguese Language Day (celebrated in 5th May annually), "Bons Raios te Meçam" (a proposal to celebrate each year the solstices and equinoxes by reproducing Eratosthenes measurements), among others.

The creation of the PLOAD will open a new door to cross country collaboration in the field of science and education. All partners already involved in the effort are highly motivated and with high expectations for the power of this new initiative. The PLOAD will build the perfect stage of collaboration in all levels starting from early school education to innovation in research and industrial development. This new alliance will build on IAU's vision and move beyond its challenges bringing equal opportunities by bridging the existing gaps and offering a rich collaboration and support environment. Equality and no borders will be our moto.