

The Columba-Hypatia Project: Astronomy for Peace†

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Abstract. “Columba-Hypatia: Astronomy for Peace” is a joint astronomy outreach project by GalileoMobile and the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) which takes place on the divided island of Cyprus. The project aims to inspire young people, through astronomy, to be curious about science and the cosmos, while also using astronomy as a tool for promoting meaningful communication and a Culture of Peace and Non-violence. We conduct educational astronomy activities and explore the cosmos with children and the public, bringing together individuals from the various communities of Cyprus ‘under the same sky’ to look beyond borders and inspire a sense of global citizenship.

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1. Implementation

The main phase of the project began in 2017, and ran throughout the entire year. The project involved mono-communal school visits – where trainers visited Greek-Cypriot (GC) and Turkish-Cypriot (TC) schools separately in Cyprus – and bi-communal activity days, where children from GC and TC schools came together in the United Nations-controlled ‘buffer zone’, to meet each other and participate in astronomy activities.

During the mono-communal visits we focused on introducing the children to the project, and to basic astronomical concepts. The activities were chosen to give the children an idea of the place of the Earth in the context of modern astronomy and to introduce them to the vast scales and sizes of the Universe, as well as introducing the concept of the Earth as a ‘Pale blue dot’‡.

During the bi-communal days, children from the GC and TC communities came together in the buffer zone to participate in astronomy activities, such as the “Building a Cyprus Golden Record” activity. During this activity the children were split into mixed groups and were given the opportunity to discuss between them what they would send to an alien civilisation as a representation of the whole of the island of Cyprus. This allowed the children to get to know each others’ cultures, and to discover the many similarities between them, while also appreciating the differences and rich diversity of the island.

2. Concluding remarks

Through this project, we experienced how effective astronomy is in promoting a feeling of global citizenship and a culture of peace, enabling children to broaden their views and interactively explore together their place on Earth and, specifically for our project, on the island of Cyprus. The project was implemented successfully during 2017, and current and future instalments are ongoing and planned for the coming years.

† <https://www.columbahypatia-project.org/>

‡ <http://www.planetary.org/explore/space-topics/earth/pale-blue-dot.html>