

To continue as an FP7-funded project

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EUROPLANET: European Planetology Network

The EU-funded EuroPlaNet project seeks to provide a framework for networking and exchange of information between the many scientific research communities working in the field of planetary sciences in Europe. EuroPlaNet aims to achieve long-term integration of planetary sciences in Europe, thus optimising the results of related research and the findings produced by international planetary missions. It also seeks to develop effective communication on planetology to raise awareness among the general public, in particular children and young people.

● REACHING FOR THE PLANETS

Planetary science goes behind the curtain to uncover how planetary systems and their components were formed, how they evolved and how they will continue to evolve in the future. Many of the areas it addresses, such as the impact of aerosols on climatic evolution, have important implications for our understanding of Earth.

But today, planetary exploration extends well beyond the borders of Earth into deep space. Thanks to major scientific investment into a number of highly visible research infrastructures, Europe has been participating in several exciting and ambitious space exploration missions aimed at increasing our understanding of distant planets and their systems. These include observation missions to terrestrial planets (Mars Express, Venus Express,

SMART-1 to the moon, BepiColombo to Mercury), small bodies (Rosetta, which is expected to land on a comet nucleus in 2014), and the outer planets of our solar system (Cassini-Huygens mission to Titan and Saturn).

The planetary sciences involve an impressively wide range of disciplines, skills and expertise, including many of the natural sciences (astronomy, astrophysics, space plasma physics, atmospheric sciences, geology, geophysics, geochemistry, etc) and basic disciplines such as physics, chemistry, hydrodynamics, materials science and scientific instrumentation. Successfully advancing research in this field will, to a large extent, depend on how effectively these different disciplines can converge and co-operate to pursue common agendas.

● CONVERGING INTERESTS

EuroPlaNet seeks to strengthen the networking of planetary sciences in Europe by promoting exchanges between the different partners, including non-European and international partners, as well as by providing support to planetary exploration missions. It boosts synergies and joint research projects, in particular through working groups, workshops, the exchange of personnel, joint observation campaigns and the development of dedicated tools for the easy exchange of data and information. The initial focus of the project has been on providing support to the Cassini-Huygens mission.

Planetary exploration already has strong media appeal and fires the public's imagination. The impact of the successful Huygens landing on Titan, on 14 January 2005 - with images relayed by media around the world - testify to our fascination with the exploration of new worlds.

Building on this natural interest, EuroPlaNet develops specific outreach and communication activities aimed at increasing the awareness and understanding of European citizens, especially children and young people, of the results of planetary observation and space exploration programmes. This task has a double objective - in addition to improving the quality of information provided to the public, it may also help to attract our budding scientists of the future to this important field of research.

60 European laboratories, institutions and space agencies, representing 17 European countries, are part of EuroPlaNet. Close collaboration with the US is also an important feature.



● EUROPEAN PLANETOLOGY NETWORK IN SUMMARY

Project acronym: EuroPlaNet

Funding scheme (FP6): Coordination Action (CA)

EU financial contribution: €2 million

EU project officer: Elena Righi-Steele

Duration: 48 months

Start date: 1 January 2005

Completion date: 31 December 2008

Project webpage: <http://europlanet.cesr.fr/>

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Associate participants:

USA: NASA / GSFC, JPL, JHU/APL, LASP, LPL Tucson, SPRL, SSI Boulder, SWRI San Antonio, University of Iowa

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