

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
NEW WORLDS - INNOVATIVE SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH (4)

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FROM SIMPLE FASCINATION TO PROFESSIONAL PROJECTS - THE POLISH WEBCOMMUNITY
PERSPECTIVE.**Abstract**

During the last 5 years the Polish astro4u.net node for astronomy and astronautics has seen an substantial growth. In years 2004-2006, it was a small place to discuss topics related to space exploration. During next several years, this place started to be more popular and several professionals joined, including those who worked in ESA and NASA projects. As of February 2010, the forum had over 2000 active users and over 180000 messages written.

Starting from 2007, ideas for joint projects emerged. Firstly, the community created professionally designed and easy to read reports, commenting ongoing space events to share the news with appropriate details with others. At the same time, the community co-organised student conferences, workshops and events with speakers from various local space organizations.

In January 2009, users from the astro4u.net node launched a supplementing space portal named kosmonauta.net. The main idea was to inform about space-related developments in a convenient way and to create a common ground for local groups to share their news. Kosmonauta.net also launched "live" reports of ongoing space events, a feat which was not accomplished by any other local portal.

As of early 2010, kosmonauta.net has over 1100 written articles and is read by at least thousand unique visitors daily. Moreover, representatives are present at various events - from airshows to space-industry trade meetings. Scientific organizations, like the Polish Space Research Center, frequently send official newsletters to the portal for release.

Now users of astro4u.net and kosmonauta.net are also involved in a stratospheric balloon project, aimed to be launched in the following months. If successful, this mission will be first in series of ambitious projects, which will give some scientific and engineering experience to interested users.

The community was also involved in the ESMO media campaign. A unified voice of students, technical universities and web users managed to secure the funding for Polish participants of this project.

In the near future, users and authors from astro4u.net and kosmonauta.net plan to start to intensify the international cooperation on upcoming projects. The aim is also to actively promote various projects and achievements on a local and international scale. By this, better understanding, awareness and interest of space-related issues should be achieved, as well as better presence in mass media and education.