**Exploring the Cosmic Neighbourhood by Planetary Paths**

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**Introduction**

To communicate astronomy with the public during IYA 2009 a lot of new creative ideas came up and were realized successfully. But also established tools have contributed their part. Planetary Paths are one of these tools. In a simple, but impressive manner they illustrate the dimensions of our direct cosmic surroundings – the solar system. Scaling down the distances and diameters of planets and the sun, opens up new vistas on the neighbours of earth. So, the first interest dealing with astronomy and natural sciences should be generated in people – a concept successfully implemented in Göttingen as elsewhere.

**Planetary Paths in Göttingen**

After some years of planning in September 2003 in Göttingen the first planetary path leading directly through a city centre was opened under the responsibility of Förderkreis Planetarium Göttingen (FPG) in collaboration with town-administration, sponsors and a local artist. A scaling factor of 1:2 billion was chosen. Starting near the railway station the sun and all inner planets are located along the radial road eastwards towards city centre. Jupiter is placed in the centre, Saturn where the historical town wall was, Uranus, Neptun and Pluto in housing areas and the nearby forest. Each planet is represented by a bronze stele containing a model of the object, basic data and so called curiosity elements, i.e. keywords suggesting special properties animating people to subsequent examination. The sun - a bronze sphere 70 cm in diameter - is mounted on three stands. Between them bronze slabs are providing information about the solar system, the sun and local connections.

**Summary**

Since opening of the planetary path about 700 people have attended guided walks offered by the FPG. Approximately 30 % were children and teenagers. Being public accessible the number of people walking along the way initiated by kindergartens, schools, associations or private inducement is heavy to estimate. But the call for the accompanying leaflet edited by the FPG gives some hint of about 5000 people remarking the path conciously. Our path is one of the more extensive installations. For all bronze steles sponsors had to be found because no public money was available. Additionally, convincing the public administration, defining the contents of the steles and coordinating the whole project were the main duties. But basically the simple idea has no needs to be realized in such a complex manner. Also with low budgets planetary paths may be designed with a high didactical potential according to the intention to popularize astronomy.

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All photographs are from private sources.

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