

RADIONET3

TRIPS OF NA-QUESERA

SUBJECT	ASTRONET 'Town Meeting'
DATE	13 July 2013
PLACE	Turku, Finland
PARTICIPANTS	Simon Garrington, Huib van Langevelde

BACKGROUND:

The ASTRONET “Town Meeting”: Mid-Term Review of Science Vision and Infrastructure Roadmap, was held in conjunction to the annual meeting of the European Astronomical Society EWASS2013. The “Town Meeting” took place on 13 July 2013.

The ASTRONET consortium of European funding agencies was formed in 2005 to assemble a comprehensive, science-based strategic plan for the development of all of European astronomy for the next 15-20 years. A “mid-term review” is now under way, and ASTRONET invites the criticisms, ideas and suggestions of the community on its draft report, soon to be made available for comment. To this end, a full-day discussion meeting was organised in conjunction with the EWASS 2013 conference, benefiting from the presence of a large number of European astronomers for that event. Comments on any aspect of the draft mid-term report can be made during the discussions.

More information on: http://www.astro.utu.fi/EWASS2013/astronet_programme.php

HIGHLIGHTS:

Approximately 120 people gathered for this meeting, held on a sunny Saturday in Turku. Among the participants were a number of people from the radio community, van der Hulst and Shmeld and a number of (Finnish) junior staff, besides Garrington and van Langevelde, representing RadioNet3. Of course there was an ERTRC representation: Wijers (who did most of the talking) and Grewing, plus several national funding agency representatives (Stark, Vincent, Mourard). Mourard, who is now the coordinator of this ERANET, introduced the ASTRONET meeting. Then Robson did an overview on the science vision update that he edited, highlighting in which areas changes were notable over the last 5 years. He noted that this was Europe’s version of the US decadal review ‘but better’: prioritised and affordable. This update was STFC’s responsibility and was ‘very light touch’: the big science questions were perceived to be unchanged, and the update was based solely on discussion with the panel chairs. Next he discussed the revised roadmap, which was derived from this science vision update. The main issues concerned the lack of X-ray instrumentation; only few changes in the radio were noticeable. It was noted by Robson that ‘more-than-expected’ progress was made on the SKA definition. The progress with ALMA and various SKA pathfinders was listed. The RadioNet TNA programme was noted. There were some concerns listed on long-wavelength solar observing capabilities, to which the Ukrainian representatives responded. But the funding situation for (sub)-mm observatories (i.e. JCMT) was labelled precarious and it was deemed necessary to make a study of these in his view. He characterised the overall funding position as ‘not brilliant, but not desperate’, and planned to organize a meeting of funding agencies in October. The following discussion focused on near earth objects and space programmes, especially potential dependence on a US single supplier of IR detector arrays. (Robson agreed that the concern here was on single supplier rather than specifically US). In subsequent discussion there was a focus on economic motivation for astronomy, Courvoisier argued that the cultural aspect should be stressed rather than plain economics. The need to encourage active investment by industrial partners (as happens in the US) was noted. The importance of continuing support for smaller and medium programmes was also noted. Note that suggestions for changes are still welcomed by Robson and his committee, especially on any gaps, new technologies or overlaps.

After coffee a review on astro-particle physics by Katsanevas (ASPERA) was presented. Zajac presented options for the future of ASTRONET, possibly arriving at a self-sustaining coordination body. Courvoisier raised the concern that ASTRONET might be seen as a small club of Funding Agencies and noted (of course) the community base of the EAS. Wijers and others asked whether we need such a bureaucratic organisation: better to use cheap and widely available expertise from the community but Genova stressed the need for a strong organisation when negotiating with Brussels. Katsanevas pointed out that in developing APPEC he completely changed his starting position of wanting a strong legal entity and ended up putting together a MOU-based consortium. Vincent finally commented that any organisation would be no heavier than it needed to be. On solar physics there was a talk presented by Collados. Afterwards, there was some discussion on how to proceed with establishing organizations for these processes. After lunch the focus was first on ‘modest’-sized optical telescopes by Gallego. This ETSRC arrived a list of recommendation (published in May 2010) concerning specialization and coordination. This has taken shape in joint proposal rounds and new, specialized instrumentation (e.g. MOONS for VLT and WEAVE for WHT). The future of the ING was still recognised as very uncertain, despite the recommendation for combined operations at La Palma. Then Wijers introduced the preliminary ERTRC findings, stressing that they were for discussion and not even provisional at this stage Further input was required and welcome,

there would be a draft in the autumn and hopefully a final report by the end of the year. He started by giving some background and introduction on the terms and composition of the committee. The state of European radio astronomy was 'extremely vibrant and crucial to achieving some of the Science Vision goals'. The future requirement to maintain a range of facilities in addition to SKA was noted. In the general findings, a transition to an increasing intensity of international collaboration is signalled. Wijers highlighted some of the recommendations, notably with respect to the SKA technology and governance development. He noted that there is great potential to increase science impact with VLBI and other radio facilities. Single dishes enhance their science by combining for VLBI and pulsar timing. Open Skies policies are important, and he expressed the opinion that only 10% open skies for the SKA seems too little. He also highlighted the need to for a more robust organization in radio astronomy. The committee wants to see more accessible and homogeneous data products. The first reaction was from the Ukraine, questioning why their telescope was missed. Then van Langevelde resonated with most points of the ERTRC and noted that RadioNet has its own governance study. He also asked how these findings are going to feed into ASTRONET's main recommendation. Garrington asked for recommendations on the frequency protection that the ERTRC signalled and pointed out the value of having support from astronomers *at all wavelengths*. He also asked about the tension between specialisation (as recommended for optical telescopes) vs. common capabilities, as required to join arrays and networks. Wijers noted the value of any new or existing telescopes being able to join arrays but felt that there could be niches for some single dishes. Garrington also stood up for the current EVN collaboration structure that is largely functioning very well. Then Genova questioned whether the result was not obvious valid for any community, to which Wijers answered that radio astronomy has no ESO. Following a question by Bode, Wijers pointed out that the final report will have a table with the relevance of individual telescopes for the Science Vision. Other questions concerned lessons learned from LOFAR and Wijers responded that it is a wonderful demonstration platform for new technologies, but that the software complexity had been underestimated. He also explained the open skies principle again. And the need for a concerted European radio body was discussed and explained again.

The next thing on the agenda was Stark's report on other ASTRONET initiatives. One issue was whether the SKA needs a European approach, and he proposed a forum meeting on pan-European positioning for SKA. His presentation also included items like the VO and Laboratory Astrophysics. Then Cuby talked about training, with a focus on maintaining expertise for ESA and ESO programmes. Radio was largely ignored. Palousz gave an overview on the status of astronomy in Eastern Europe communities, which was interesting from the perspective of QueSERA WP2.

Then there was a panel discussion.

The meeting was relatively well attended (for a hot Saturday in Turku) and 2 or 3 talks addressed interesting issues, still it was felt that the ASTRONET consultation would have been more effective with a shorter programme, at some time in the middle of the EWASS week. ASTRONET will claim that they have engaged with the community (and asked several times that people ticked the sign up sheet), although there were probably important sectors that were hardly represented.

NEXT STEPS:

Contact between ERTRC and RadioNet3 will continue till the publication of the final recommendations document.