

The role of the planetarium during IYA2009, the Portuguese context

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Abstract

When people seek to learn more about astronomy or are interested in observing some astronomical event, planetariums are the natural places to turn to.

In Portugal there are three planetariums with capacity for more than 80 people: Planetário Calouste Gulbenkian (320 seats), Planetário do Porto (100 seats) and Planetário de Espinho (80 seats).

There are also some smaller planetariums, like the planetarium from Museu de Ciência da Universidade de Lisboa, and several portable planetariums. The annual total of visitors to the three main planetariums exceeds 150,000, 80% of whom are students.

The active involvement of planetariums in IYA2009 has the double advantage of assuring the participation of an interested crowd, and the use of equipment and human resources already available. A strong contribution to planetariums will ensure that the investments in IYA2009 will not end on 31 December 2009, but will continue for many years to come. Among the objectives of the IYA2009, planetariums are especially well suited to take astronomy to a school audience, to promote formal and informal education, to establish connections between the scientific community and the general public, and to promote scientific culture by showing a modern image of science.

From 1998 to 2007, Portuguese planetariums hosted more than 1 million visitors, equivalent to more than 10% of the Portuguese population.

Year	Lisboa	Porto	Espinho	Total/Year	Total
1998	87152	690		87842	87842
1999	82033	18560		100593	188435
2000	77044	32611		109655	298090
2001	69461	40420	25000	134881	432971
2002	72492	37152	25000	134644	567615
2003	38915	36889	25000	100804	668419
2004	35617	30228	25000	90845	759264
2005	86438	29420	25000	140858	900122
2006	82258	28258	25000	135516	1035638

Table 1 – Annual visitor numbers for the biggest Portuguese Planetariums.



Figure 1 – Location of the largest planetarium theatres in Portugal (Lisboa 320 seats, Porto 100 seats and Espinho 80 seats).

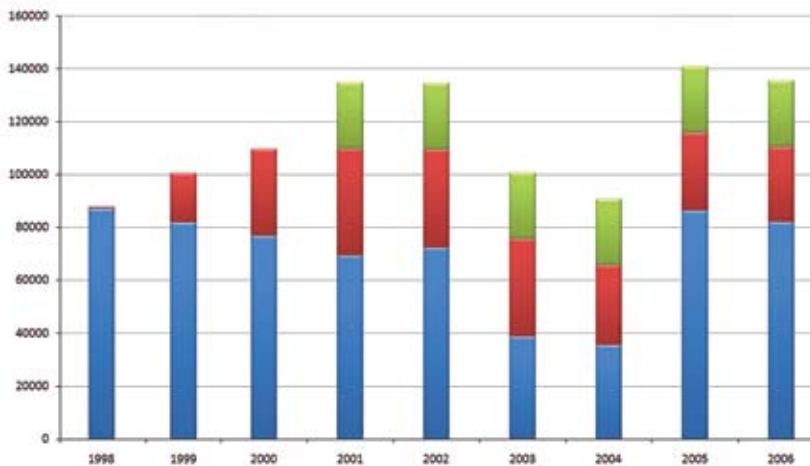


Figure 2 – Histogram of the annual visitors to the biggest Portuguese Planetariums. In the last 9 years, the national visitor average was 115,000 per year.

Google Earth

Courtesy of the author