References

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Photo: T. Tuvikene

The participants to this workshop, in the great hall of the magnificent palace of the Royal Academies for Science and the Arts of Belgium. The very special atmosphere of this historical building was very inspiring for this workshop. During the worldwide ground-based Deep Impact follow-up observing campaign, all observatories were basically linked and exchanging data, views and strategies quasi in real-time. This unique spirit prevailed also during this dedicated workshop.

Around and about "Europe's Quest for the Universe"

Jean-Pierre Swings
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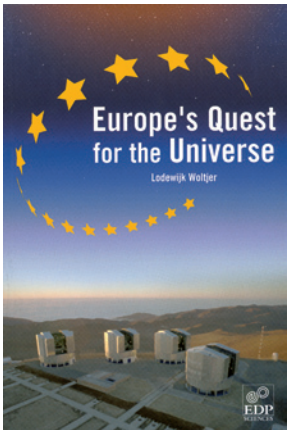
Before even starting a review of "Europe's Quest for the Universe", I think one should say a few words about its author. A truly impressive characteristic of Professor Lodewijk Woltjer is indeed his vision towards excellence, in particular towards excellence in observational astrophysics in (and for) Europe. One example: almost thirty years ago, he 'forced' some fairly conventional European observers to start working on extragalactic astrophysics on the occasion of the erection of ESO's 3.6-metre telescope, and even more so when the 3.5-m New Technology Telescope became available. As far as my own research group was concerned, this led to the discovery, via these ESO telescopes, of several gravitational lenses. This type of research was in fact made possible because Lo Woltjer put together excellent teams of engineers and scientists at ESO dedicated to developing innovative and sophisticated telescopes and their auxiliary instruments.

Professor Woltjer, ESO's Director General for 13 years, was also instrumental in initiating studies towards conceiving and building a European Very Large Telescope (the VLT), and getting the VLT construction started. Having been deeply involved in the VLT advisory structure (which he kindly mentions in his book!) I can testify that Lo Woltjer's role was incredible: from a European vision to a remarkable ground-based astronomy machine.

In parallel to this, he also had another vision, this one about interesting objects to observe, and at which wave-bands. Here again his role in chairing the groups defining the future of European space astrophysics was really fundamental, so that ESA's Horizon 2000+ objectives became fantastic challenges.



So, in addition to his skills in theoretical astrophysics, a very interesting characteristic of Lo Woltjer concerns the two complementary facets: ground-based and space-borne astrophysics. In both cases, as briefly outlined above, he played a pivotal role. He is therefore highly qualified to have written the recent 300-page book about the origins and evolution of the European Southern Observatory (ESO) and of the science pro-

gramme of the European Space Agency (ESA): “Europe’s Quest for the Universe”*.

The preface by Philippe Busquin, former European commissioner for research, sets the tone of the book: “Great pride and optimism for European science comes across on reading these pages, all beautifully illustrated. Written to a high scientific level, this book provides the reader with a top quality reference on the subjects covered, and gives us ample reason to believe in a European research environment directed firmly to the future.”

Lo Woltjer has been involved in many, if not most, of the topics he describes in his book. He does this in a factual manner, quoting many actors, including himself, and omitting (purposely?) very few!

* To my knowledge, there exist so far two reviews of this book, one, quite detailed by Françoise Praderie, in the spring 2006 issue of Euroscience News (no. 34, page 9), the other by Giovanni Bignami, published in Nature (441, page 814, 15 June 2006).

Not only does he give us a somewhat ‘historical’ inventory of the telescopes and instruments that were built in the last three decades on the ground and for space, he also presents strong arguments for new sophisticated and ever more challenging developments. The author of “Europe’s Quest for the Universe” gives, probably as good examples to be followed, some interesting details about several of the most important astrophysical results that have been obtained in these last decades, some of which have led to attributing famous prizes (Nobel, Balzan, Gruber, …) to their ‘prime-investigators’.

In the last sections of his book, Lo Woltjer, in a well-documented way that he shares with the reader, deals with fairly controversial matters such as publications, researchers and funding (“Why fund astronomy?”), and finally he tackles a series of future projects as well as the difficult subjects of international collaborations and organisational issues, the latter two which, I think, could/should serve as challenges to e.g. the ESO Council and the present and forthcoming ESO Director General, and to their counterparts in the ESA Science and Exploration Directorates!

Let me end this very short review by briefly paraphrasing Philippe Busquin. The Universe is so magnificent that it constantly inspires both scientific and technological developments. Yet, at the same time, it remains a source of wonder and inspiration for our thoughts and dreams: is this not beautiful for all generations, especially the younger ones? Europe is definitely taking advantage of all this, as is so well demonstrated in Lo Woltjer’s book (although here and there a bit critically!). So, let’s continue to follow “Europe’s Quest for the Universe”, showing that our continent is the leader in several aspects of ground-based and space-borne astrophysics, as Lo Woltjer has shown us how to do so successfully.

Open House at the ESO Headquarters

Claus Madsen (ESO)

On 15 October, the ESO Headquarters opened its doors to the public as part of the All-Campus Open House organised in connection with the inauguration of the extension of the underground line U6 from Munich to the Garching campus. The day was blessed with clear skies and plenty of sunshine, and a large number of citizens took advantage of the opportunity to visit the campus. The estimated number of visitors at ESO was close to 3 000 people, a record number. Another record was set by the number of ESO staff who, in anticipation of the high number of guests, volunteered to spend their Sunday at work to explain what ESO is doing and why it is important.

Photo: H. H. Heyer, ESO

Visitors to the Open House learnt about ESO from exhibitions, activities, and presentations throughout the Headquarters in Garching.