

Europlanet 2020 RI Press Release

27 June 2018

Europlanet Prize for Public Engagement awarded to Amara Graps for work to inspire Baltics with space

The 2018 Europlanet Prize for Public Engagement with Planetary Science has been awarded to Dr Amara Graps for her far-reaching work to inspire and promote space activities in the Baltic region within the scientific and industrial communities, in education and in wider society.

Dr Graps, who is based in Riga, Latvia, is the founder of the not-for-profit organisation, Baltics in Space, Lead Scientist at the University of Latvia and Senior Scientist at the Planetary Science Institute, based in Tucson, Arizona. The activities of Baltics in Space in support of the European Planetary Science Congress (EPSC) 2017, which took place in Riga from 17-22 September last year made a significant contribution to raising the profile of space in Latvia and the Baltics with audiences ranging from members of Parliament, business, the media, educators and schools. By compiling a catalogue of the skills and space capabilities in the region, as well as organising a showcase exhibit at EPSC, Baltics in Space facilitated opportunities for researchers and industry based in the Baltics to build new and competitive space collaborations with each other and with the international space community. An exhibition on the Solar System was visited by 600 local schoolchildren during EPSC and has since been visited by 10,000 children at the Zinoo Science Centre in Cesis.

Dr Graps said, "The aim is to create a community where Baltic space workers can collaborate to complement each other's skill sets. We have the capabilities to achieve unique projects when we work together."

Mārtiņš Zemītis, Economic Adviser at the European Commission Representation in Latvia: "We were truly delighted to cooperate with Amara Graps in organizing the ever-largest gathering of planetary scientists in the Baltic States - the European Planetary Science Congress 2017 in Riga. Amara's personal commitment made the Congress much more than a large event, allowing for genuine outreach of the world's best planetary scientists into the Baltic society and contributing to bridging the science skills gap among the younger generation. We appreciate Amara bringing space to the Baltics and the Baltics into space."

The Europlanet Prize, which includes an award of 4000 Euros, will be presented during the European Planetary Science Congress 2018 in Berlin, Germany, on Monday 17th September.

Dr Régis Courtin, Chair of the Europlanet Prize 2018 Judging Panel, said, "The judges were impressed by the dedication and immense personal effort that Dr Graps has invested in building collaborations and raising the profile of space in the Baltic Region."

Dr J.L. Galache, Chief Technology Officer of Aten Engineering, who nominated Dr Graps for the Europlanet Prize, said, "Amara is the rare scientist who realises, naturally, intuitively, that she is not extending the boundaries of human knowledge for herself, but for everyone, and she can't wait to share that knowledge with those around her, young or old, near or far. At every stage of her career, Amara has found a way to communicate her work and her field to a wider audience. From websites to whitepapers, from teaching in a classroom to teaching through citizen science; Amara has used whatever means she had at her disposal to share her enthusiasm and passion for planetary science and learning to a broad community of colleagues, lay people and children."

Baltics in Space is now working to develop an Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Finnish (ELLF) Cubesat that will investigate climate change by measuring how the whole-disc albedo of Earth (the light

reflected by the planet) changes over time. Citizen scientists will be able to participate by providing ground validation measurements by a Raspberry Pi with albedo sensors or by using a phone app to measure the Earth's brightness reflected by the Moon.

Images

Dr Graps introducing the public event at EPSC 2017 in Riga, Latvia. Credit: Mareks Matisons LSM.lv / LMT

<http://www.europlanet-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/DSC05450-e1528295189840.jpg>

Dr Graps with Dr Kārlis Šadurskis, Minister of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science, during the public event at EPSC 2017. Credit: Mareks Matisons LSM.lv / LMT

<http://www.europlanet-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Amara.jpg>

Dr Amara Graps with conference participants at the Baltics in Space exhibition at EPSC 2017. Credit: Mareks Matisons LSM.lv / LMT

<http://www.europlanet-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/DSC05135.jpg>

The Solar System for Kids exhibition at EPSC. Credit A. Graps

http://www.europlanet-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Solar_System_for_Kids_EPSC2017.jpg

Contacts

Dr Amara Graps

amara@balticsinspace.eu

Tel: +371 28853907

Media Contacts

Anita Heward

Europlanet 2020 RI Press Officer

Mobile: +44 (0)77 5603 4243

anita.heward@europlanet-eu.org

Further information

Baltics in Space

The philosophy of the nonprofit organisation Baltics in Space is to: Inventory, Identify, and Integrate with a sprinkling of Inspiration to build a space product greater than the sum of its parts. Our best resource in the space business is people. With an eye to strengthening the triple helix links (Industry, Education, Research), our outcomes are integrating Baltic-wide space events, catalogs of skill-sets for prospective users, Baltic space project development with distributed teams and Baltic space education. <https://www.balticsinspace.eu/>

About Europlanet

Since 2005, Europlanet has provided Europe's planetary science community with a platform to exchange ideas and personnel, share research tools, data and facilities, define key science goals for the future, and engage stakeholders, policy makers and European citizens with planetary science. The Europlanet 2020 Research Infrastructure (RI) has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 654208 to provide access to state-of-the-art research facilities across the European Research Area and a mechanism to coordinate Europe's planetary science community. The project builds on a €2 million Framework 6

Coordination Action and €6 million Framework 7 Research Infrastructure funded by the European Commission.

Europlanet project website: www.europlanet-2020-ri.eu

Europlanet outreach website: www.europlanet-eu.org

Follow on Twitter via @europlanetmedia

The Europlanet Prize for Public Engagement

The Europlanet Prize for Public Engagement with Planetary Science aims to recognise achievements in engaging European citizens with planetary science and to raise the profile of outreach within the scientific community. Established by Europlanet in 2010, the Prize is awarded to individuals or groups who have developed innovative practices in planetary science communication and whose efforts have significantly contributed to a wider public engagement with planetary science.

For further information, see: <http://www.europlanet-eu.org/outreach/prize/>