Dissemination and Communication Activities for Mars Analogues Research – The European MASE project.

P. Cabezas[1], N. Walter[1], P. Rettberg[2], M. Bohmeier[2], E. Rabbow[2], K. Beblo-Vranesevic[2], A. Perras[3,4], P. Schwendner[5], C. Moissl-Eichinger[2, 6], P. Vannier[7], V. Marteinsson[7], E. Monaghan[8], P. Ehrenfreund[8, 9], L. Garcia-Descalzo[10], F. Gomez[10], M. Malki[11], R. Amils[12], F. Gaboyer[13], F. Westall[13], C. Cockell[5]. [1]European Science Foundation (ESF), Strasbourg, France. [2]German Aerospace Center (DLR), Germany. [3]Medical University of Graz, Austria. [4]Department of Microbiology and Archaea, University of Regensburg, Germany. [5]University of Edinburgh, UK. [6]BioTechMed Graz, Austria. [7]MATIS - Prokaria, Iceland. [8]Universiteit Leiden, Netherland. [9]George Washing-ton University, USA. [10]Centro de Astrobiología (INTA-CAB), Spain. [11]Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain. [12]Centre de Biophysique Moléculaire, CNRS, France.

Introduction: The Mars Analogues for Space Exploration (MASE) project is brining new insight about Mars potential habitability but also some new knowledge about Earth organisms and the functioning of extreme terrestrial ecosystems. The overall aim of the MASE project is to study a variety of Mars-like environments in order to further our understanding of Martian habitability, as well as our ability to detect organisms that might be present on Mars. This collaborative, 4 research project supported by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme has been running since January 2014 and a variety of dissemination and communication activities has been performed since then to increase visibility of Mars analogues research.

Our target audience encompasses the European and international astrobiology science and technology community, the general public, space industry/private sector and key policy stakeholders.

For communication with the scientific community, we are benefiting from Open Access scientific publications and international conferences. In this context, the project is putting big effort to produce special issues and sessions focused on Mars analogues research related topics. The MASE project also plan to convene a dedicated workshop in conjunction with the 2017 European Astrobiology Network Association conference in Aarhus (Denmark).

Mars exploration missions are massive undertakings that are managed and implemented by space agencies/industry sector in a collaborative manner. Activities performed and results obtained from MASE have a direct impact on a search for life mission design and planning. Thus, MASE is in regular contact with the European Space Agency and activities to engage with other agencies will be soon taken into action.

Providing a link between life on the Earth and life on Mars, has the potential to raise significant interest from the general public. For the project to reach this audience, we targeted journalists from science popular magazines and also organized a set of press conferences. This approach dramatically increased the visibility of the MASE project on outreach publications and media platforms. Alternative communication channels as press releases, newsletters and blog entries have also been regularly used to communicate with broader audiences with a positive outcome. Moreover, MASE scientist have been quite involved in outreach events to promote astrobiological research at local level.

More recently, the MASE project have created a booklet title "A guide to Martian landascapes on Earth" to promote Mars analogues research. This hardcopy printed product resulted very successful to attract the attention of both specialized and general public audiences in conferences and science outreach events.

A variety of internet based products are also used on regular basis to convey the main outcomes of the MASE project:

- MASE website www.mase.esf.org
- Twitter @MarsAnalogues
- Facebook MASE @MarsAnalogues

These social media platforms have been proved to be the fastest and more effective way to internationally communicate MASE outcomes. The MASE webpage has attracted 2.1 visits/day on average during the last year from 111 countries. Through Facebook, we have mostly engaged with general audience interested on space and astrobiology research topics, while Twitter audience is narrower and directly linked with the astrobiology scientific community.

Finally, the MASE project has maximized opportunities to engage with key policy stakeholders at European level. Recently, MASE was presented at "Earth Analogue Workshop" at the Research Executive Agency in Brussels. The high level goal of this workshop was to bring together a community that share interests on analogue research, fostering the sharing of best practices and lessons learnt, while exploring the potential synergies. This type of activity resulted pivotal to provide input to policymakers about directions that astrobiological research should take in Europa for future progress.