



RESEARCHERS' NIGHT 2009
SETTING THE STAGE IN PORTUGAL:
RESEARCHERS AND THE PUBLIC
COME TOGETHER THROUGH
THEATRE

Summary Report

Through the medium of theatre and interactive activities, SettingTheStage brought together nine partners and several collaborating organisations, across four major cities in Portugal - Porto, Coimbra, Lisbon and Olhao - to create multiple spaces where scientists and the public actively engaged in the reality of being a scientist and in the two big scientific celebrations of 2009: the 400th anniversary of Galileo's first use of the telescope, and the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth.

Research centres, universities, a small-medium enterprise (SME), a science museum and theatre groups developed a project with a series of theatre performances at its core, specifically produced for SettingTheStage, designed to stimulate reflection, discussion and debate on topics related to researchers and their everyday lives - the power and limits of their research, their excitements and disappointments, the decisions they face, the impact of their research in society - and also on the issues raised by the scientific endeavour, from the times of Darwin, Galileo, Jules Verne until today. A range of interactive activities complemented the performances, including hands-on activities, 'speed-dating' with scientists, Café and Bars Scientifique, live music by scientists' bands, jamming sessions. One of the main aims of SettingTheStage was to produce science communication tools and material that would outlive Researchers' Night itself, being available to project partners and other institutions to use in their science communication activities.

Emphasis throughout the project was on enthusing researchers to communicate their research to the general public and gain skills in this communication, on the one hand, and on empowering the public to express their views on the issues being raised, on the other. Researchers from all areas and at different stages in their careers were involved in all these activities: facilitating the interactive activities, co-authoring scripts, and as actors in the performances.

Awareness for these events was achieved through a concerted marketing campaign, bringing together the expertise and resources of all partners involved. The core message that was delivered throughout the project lifetime centred on theatre and the performing arts as a means to bring researchers and the public together for Researchers' Night. A common awareness campaign was developed and implemented, including a logo, a dedicated [website](#), [blog](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) sites, which registered the experiences of the researchers-actors and provided information about the project to an estimated 20 000 people. Together with other awareness initiatives, such as press releases, partners' mailing lists, city guides, posts on partners' and participating organisations' websites, we estimate that approximately 700 000 people were reached during the awareness campaign.

For a period of six months, 55 researchers worked with theatre groups to produce several performances, aimed at different age groups: 4-13 year olds, 14-plus. A total of 13 theatre performances/plays were produced specifically for SettingTheStage, across the four cities. These included a puppet theatre production on evolution; physical theatre performances on the themes of the birth of life and evolution, on Charles Darwin's book 'The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals' and the life journey of a scientist; a forum theatre production on the different features of a researchers' professional and personal life; stand-up comedy by researchers on science, life, sports, religion, etc; a production of Jules Verne's play 'Monsieur de Chimpanzé'; a satire around intelligent design; a futuristic scenario of an evolutionary biologist's research; a play in which theatre is used to illustrate the different stages of scientific research; a comedy on the life of Darwin, and children's

theatre on neuroscience research and on Charles Darwin's life and work. These performances have been repeated after Researchers' Night, at different venues, across the country, at the request of theatres, community groups, science centres and research institutes. All performances have been received very positively, thus underscoring their success as effective science communication tools.

SettingTheStage took place in four different venues: town squares in Oporto, a science centre in Coimbra, the gardens of a major cultural institution in Lisbon, and a shopping centre in Olhao. The venues were chosen so that it would be possible, in a single venue per city, to create multiple but interconnecting spaces for the performances and parallel activities. All venues were carefully selected and prepared to ensure the appropriate conditions for the theatre performances, in terms of light, sound, scenario but also, importantly, to allow for strong and free interactions between researchers and the public, either during or after the performances, or during the parallel activities.

A range of interactive activities were developed and run for SettingTheStage, including exhibitions, Cafés and Bars Scientifique, speed-dating with scientists, hands-on activities, telescope-building workshops, sky-watching, live music and jamming sessions. Across the four cities, just under 300 researchers took part as volunteers demonstrators, speakers, 'speed-daters', photographers, collecting questionnaires, group guides, and more. The four venues received 12 800 visitors, over the 10-13 hours that the event lasted.

Questionnaire findings suggest that the aims of SettingTheStage were attained as regards the overall rating of the event (95% of respondents considered the event to be 'very good' or 'good'), it's innovativeness (95% of respondents), the opportunity it gave visitors to learn new things (96% of respondents) and express their views (90% of visitors) and the impact it had on narrowing the gap between researchers and society and increase social awareness of science (97% of respondents).

This project was developed by:

[Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciencia \(IGC\)](#)

[Instituto de Tecnologia Química e Biológica \(ITQB\)](#)

[Instituto de Medicina Molecular \(IMM\)](#)

[Instituto de Biologia Celular e Molecular \(IBMC\)](#)

[Centro de Astrofísica da Universidade do Porto \(CAUP\)](#)

[Universidade do Porto Inovação – Universidade do Porto \(UPIN\)](#)

[Centro Regional de Inovação do Algarve \(CRIA\) - Universidade do Algarve](#)

[Museu da Ciência da Universidade de Coimbra](#)

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[Teatro e Marionetas de Mandrágora](#)

[MARIONET Theatre Group](#)

[MIAU Associação Cultural](#)

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Other partners:

[Associação Viver a Ciência](#)

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