

BAO Outreach Activities and Scientific Journalism in Armenia

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Abstract

The paper gives an overview of BAO Outreach Activities and Scientific Journalism in Armenia. We emphasize the role of scientific journalism in raising awareness among public on the topics of astronomy and science in general.

1. Introduction

Science journalism is an occupation that conveys reporting about science to the public. We're living in a century of abundant information. Information itself is a power, thus, valuable information is the greatest power. Journalism is an occupation that disseminates the information, brings people together around various topics. Scientific journalism (science journalism or science writing) is a tool that makes science available to people and brings them close to science. In our humble opinion, humanity moves forward, due to science. So, basically science unleashes human potential, serves to the goals of humanity, whereas, science journalism makes these activities publicly known.

Science journalism covers some of the most complex, exciting, and important issues of our day. And these stories like any other appear in newspapers and magazines, in print and online, on the radio and TV, and in podcasts and videos. Nowadays, blogs, Facebook and twitter pages are among the widely used media tools. Among them, for instance, National Geographic, a television network and flagship channel is widely known, airing non-fiction television programs, featuring documentaries with factual content involving science; or we can note different blogs, such as Cosmos, Science daily, Science, Scientific America, etc., all serving as a bridge between scientists and the community.

2. Scientific journalism in Armenia

The situation is a bit different in Armenia. When we google the term "scientific journalism" in Armenian we find few materials on it. The same refers to the curricula of the universities. Armenian universities have great courses on journalism, even some high schools and colleges have that specialty. However, the courses of scientific journalism have not been established yet, though, we believe, it can be beneficial to have this field developed not only for Armenia but also for the whole world in general. It will create a platform for cooperation making exchange of information possible.

Big efforts have been made for the development of Scientific Journalism in Armenia. With the purpose of that, in 2010 Facebook group of Scientific Journalists of Armenia was formed due to Areg Mickaelian, aiming at gathering journalists around this particular field and enhancing its development. At present, among group members there are around 200 journalists and 500 scientists. Already since 2009 several seminars have been organized and Annual Awards have been presented to journalists at BAO. The first Scientific Journalism prizes in Armenia were awarded in 2009 on the occasion of the International Year of Astronomy: having nominations for the most active scientific journalist 2009 and the best scientific paper. Later, prizes were awarded in 2011, which was jointly established by ArAS

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(Armenian Astronomical Society) and the Oxford Armenian Society, and the tradition continued in 2014, 2016 (BAO-70) and special prizes were awarded to ARMACAD scientific network (founder and coordinator – Khachik Gevorgyan) and the Armenian Scientific Cooperation (ARMSCOOP, founder and coordinator – Armen Martirosyan) for popularization of science. In summer of 2019 we again attempted to bring journalists together by hosting a seminar on scientific journalism. The journalists, who had significant contribution in disseminating information about science on their own initiative by the end of the year, were nominated for the prizes, hoping to encourage the others to dedicate themselves to this work as well. The Scientific Journalism Prizes 2019 were awarded in 3 nominations: the best printed/online article- Grigor Emin-Teryan; the best audio/video news coverage-Yelena Chobanyan; the most active journalists - Ani Karapetyan and Mari Taryan.

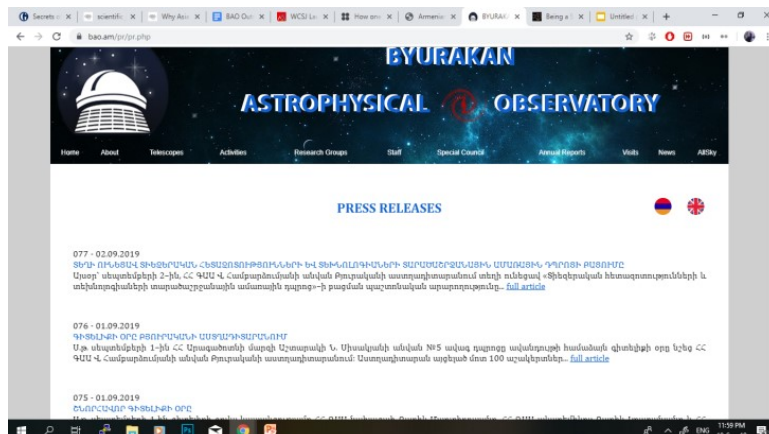
ArAS has a great role in developing scientific journalism in Armenia as well. ArAS webpage contains information, regular press-releases.

“Astghagitak” (“Star Expert”) is E-journal that collects information on astronomy and provides the links to the materials for the users of all ages (<https://www.aras.am//Astghagitak>).

3. BAO outreach activities

Due to its outreach activities, BAO contributes to the development of scientific journalism as well:

- Press Releases. In March 2019 we started the list of BAO press releases, touching upon various topics connected to BAO and Astronomy in general, including scientific and sky events, BAO scientific and educational activities, etc. (almost 80 press releases by September, 2019). The press releases are available on BAO official website, Facebook page. Moreover, they are occasionally distributed to mass media representatives interested in Scientific Journalism. We should note that BAO closely cooperates with mass media keeping the mailing list constantly updated. This collaboration brings forth to dozens of publications, interviews, press-conferences and articles in Armenian and other languages communicating science to a broad audience.



- BAO Interviews. Since 2019, we have initiated BAO interviews to cover various topics of great importance that present interest for the general public and have not received enough coverage by mass media or otherwise. A number of popular articles (ex. in the NAS RA journal “*In the World of Science*”), press-conferences, radio/TV programs and films are being produced every year as well.
- Public Events. BAO organizes various events on Astronomy and related fields, namely public events, like open door events, movie screenings, exhibitions, seminars, conferences, etc. It is important to note that thousands of people (RA and other citizens) visit BAO annually.
- Astro Tourism. BAO is also actively engaged in Astro Tourism (science tourism), being one of the leading institutions of RA. Nowadays, BAO has a project called “*Development of Astro Tourism in South West Asia*”. The leader of the project is Areg Mickaelian, Director of IAU SWA ROAD. The objective of the project is to develop Astro tourism in South West and Central Asia. Astro Tourism may significantly contribute to education by involving school pupils and students in cognitive tours to research organizations offering society a tight connection with science.

In summary, we wish to emphasize that the development of scientific journalism should be a joint effort for both humanity and science can contribute from it.

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