

The Role of Mathematicians in Raising the Public Awareness of Mathematics

(Talk)

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Although all mathematicians and most scientists are aware that mathematics is fundamental for the modern society, most people are used to consider mathematics as a fixed set of rules and formulas with the only use being performing elementary calculations in daily life. In fact, one can say that the level of public understanding of mathematics is in sharp contrast to the importance of mathematics for society.

Although persons of various vocations can be (and are) active in communication and popularization of mathematics, the role of mathematicians themselves in these tasks is not to be neglected. Consequently various efforts are made on national and international levels to coordinate the activities of individual mathematicians and mathematical organizations, as well as other persons active in popularization of mathematics. On European level, the main body concerned with this is the European Mathematical Society's Committee for Raising Public Awareness of Mathematics (RPA). As said on the official EMS's webpage: "The remit of the Committee for Raising Public Awareness of Mathematics — appointed by the EMS — is (a) to encourage and inspire actions directed towards raising public awareness of the importance of mathematics for contemporary society in a cultural and historical perspective and (b) to assist in the furtherance of concerted actions with other European or international organisations and societies in matters of raising public awareness of science and technology and other important aspects of society with a strong component of mathematics."

In this presentation an overview of the RPA Committee's activities shall be given, including some practical ideas on how (and how not) to communicate mathematics to various types of audience.

MSC2010: 97A80, 00A09, 00A05, 00A99.

Keywords: popularization of science, hands-on mathematical activities, mathematical busking, communicating mathematics.

Section: 19. Mathematics Education and Popularization of Mathematics .