

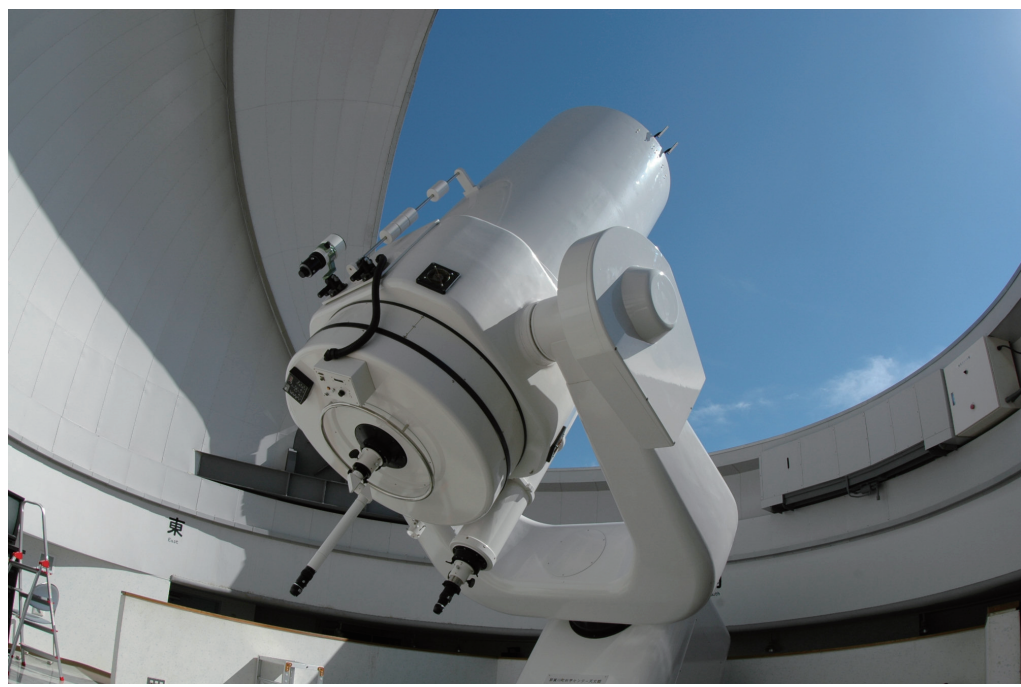
JAPOs: 100 Years of Japanese Public Astronomical Observatories

Connecting People with the Universe Through Public Astronomy, Education, and Community Engagement
A Nationwide Network of Public Astronomical Observatories Serving Society for a Century

The Shimane Nature Museum of Mt. Sanbe "Sahimel"

What Are Japanese Public Astronomical Observatories?

In Japan, facilities established primarily to provide opportunities for the general public to observe real celestial objects and engage with astronomy and natural science are known as public astronomical observatories (PAOs). Through night sky observations using telescopes and a wide range of astronomy education and public outreach activities, PAOs connect people with the universe and contribute to the development of scientific culture and lifelong learning. Some PAOs are operated as part of museums or science centres, while others are centered around the observatory, operated by local governments, private organizations, or community-based institutions. In addition to providing opportunities for astronomical observations, PAOs play diverse roles in the collection and preservation of astronomical materials, research activities, astronomy education, and public engagement.



▲ 113-cm Reflecting Telescope
(Photo Credits: Anan Science Center, Tokushima)

◀ Public Observing Session with a Large Telescope
(Photo Credits: Saji Observatory, Tottori)

1926 → 2026 The 100th Anniversary of Public Astronomical Observatories in Japan

The year 2026 marks the 100th anniversary of Kurashiki Astronomical Observatory, the first public astronomical observatory established in Japan.

Over the past century, Japanese PAOs have developed as science education facilities deeply rooted in local communities. Many observatories are located outside major urban areas and serve as important centres for astronomy experiences, school education, and lifelong learning.

Throughout their history, PAOs have contributed not only to the popularisation of astronomy but also to community development, cultural enrichment, and the education of future generations.

To commemorate this milestone, JAPOs is promoting activities that communicate the history, achievements, and future vision of Japanese PAOs to both domestic and international visitors.



▲ Established in Kurashiki, Okayama Prefecture, in 1926 as Japan's first public astronomical observatory. Equipped with a 32-cm reflecting telescope, it offered public observing opportunities. The photograph shows the observatory and its staff in its early years.
(Photo Credits: Kurashiki Observatory, Okayama; JAPOs 100th Anniversary Survey and History Compilation Working Group)

Japan Public Observatory Society (JAPOs)

Japanese Public Observatory Society (JAPOs) is the national organization connecting public observatories and astronomy educators throughout Japan. JAPOs is primarily composed of individual members and currently includes more than 200 astronomy educators, together with over 150 public observatories and supporting organizations. The mission of JAPOs is to promote the development of public astronomical observatories and to support lifelong learning through encounters with real celestial objects.

The association serves as a nationwide network of observatory professionals and astronomy communicators and conducts a variety of activities, including:

- Annual conferences and research meetings
- Professional training workshops for observatory staff
- Research and survey projects
- Collaboration with related organizations
- Information sharing and network management

Through these activities, JAPOs promotes cooperation among observatories and supports the sustainable development of public astronomy outreach in Japan.



▲ JAPOs Annual Conference

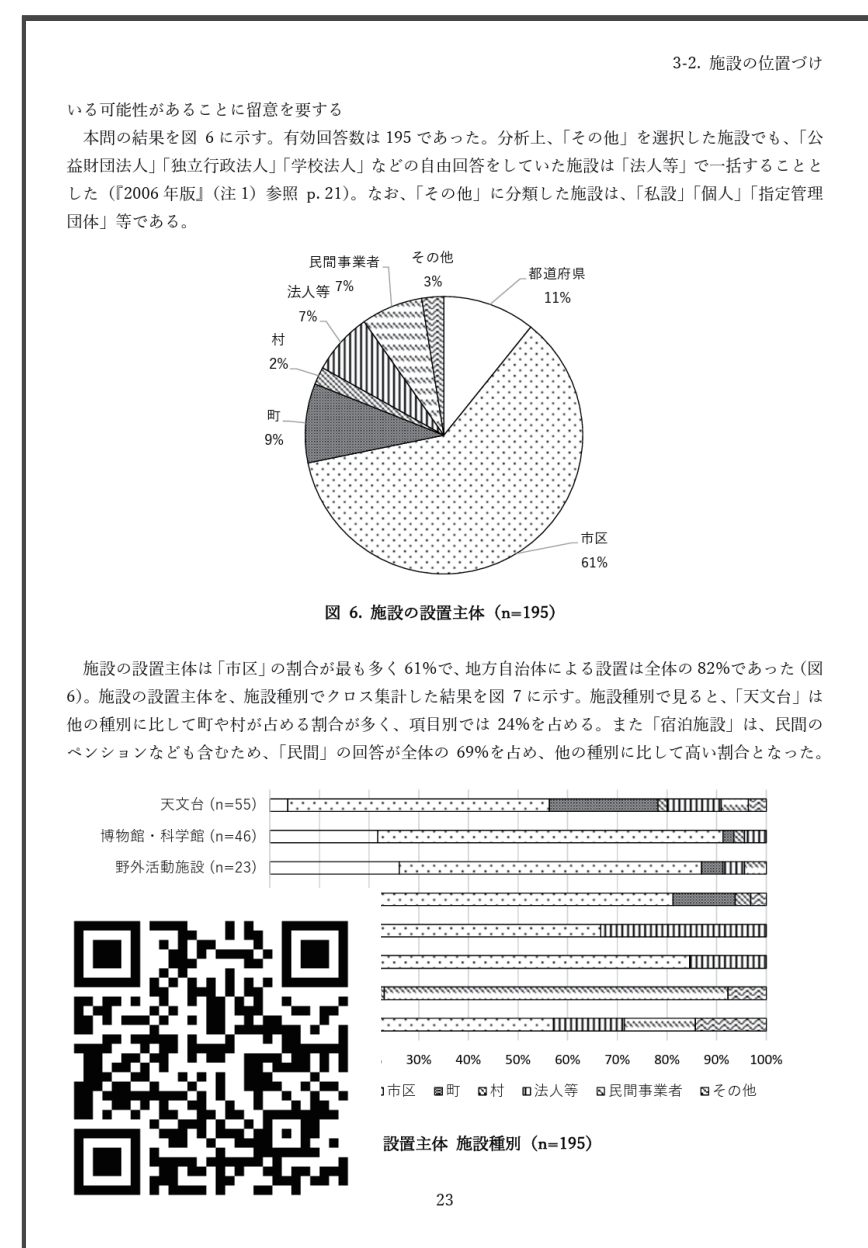


▲ Training workshop for observatory staff

The White Paper on Japanese Public Astronomical Observatories

To better understand the current status of PAOs, JAPOs periodically publishes the White Paper on Public Astronomical Observatories.

The White Paper compiles nationwide survey data on observatory facilities, telescope equipment, operating organizations, visitor participation, astronomy education programs, and public outreach activities. These surveys provide valuable information on the current status, operational challenges, and future potential of Japanese PAOs. They also serve as important resources for strategic planning, policy discussions, and the continued development of astronomy outreach activities. Long-term nationwide surveys focusing specifically on public astronomical observatories are relatively rare internationally and represent one of JAPOs' distinctive contributions to the field.



▲ The White Paper on Public Astronomical Observatories (2018) and Download the full report (Japanese only)

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調査研究委員会
国際連携推進委員会
天文体験プログラムに関する研修委員会
公開天文台 100 周年調査・編集ワーキンググループ

制作：日本公開天文台協会 国際連携推進委員会