

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)  
Space Culture: Innovative Approaches for Public Engagement in Space (9)

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DRIVING COSTA RICAN SOCIETY BEYOND AN UNDERDEVELOPMENT SCHEME OF  
THINKING ABOUT AEROSPACE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Abstract**

The Central American Association for Aeronautics and Space (ACAE, in Spanish) is a non-profit organization, which leads the efforts to introduce the Central American region in the world's technological paradigm of aerospace development. Its vision is to inspire the Central American talent to participate developing the aerospace field.

Historically, fields of this level of scientific and technological complexity, have been reserved exclusively for developed countries; a notion that is being reversed in recent years with the lowering cost of technology, and the trend of the global economy towards outsourcing, which generates niches for developing countries.

From 2010, the Government of Costa Rica, under the leadership of President Laura Chinchilla, made explicit its commitment to host a development model based on innovation, and to support the aerospace development in the country. This idea was met with surprise and disbelief by many sectors of the media and the civil society. However, ACAE emerged within this context as a pioneer organization which operates in a field that is still incipient in the region, seeking to convince the different key actors (Government, Academia, Industry and Civil Society) of the potential and long term benefits from getting involved into the aerospace development.

For any country, overcoming "underdevelopment", goes beyond the existence of potential niches for economic growth, it involves breaking with obsolete paradigms of traditional thinking. This is why the role of ACAE on bringing civil society closer to science, technology and space, is imperative. Throughout conferences, activities, competitions, technological projects, media outreach, etc. the association's work involves converting aerospace development in a cultural product that Costa Rican citizens can digest, support and become active participants of it.

The time when science was created for scientists has come to an end. In the current world knowledge is one of the most valuable assets and capable of opening and closing gaps between development and underdevelopment. This paper calls to reflect on how we are communicating science, how we should communicate it, and especially, how do ordinary citizens understand it. It reviews the efforts, challenges and impact of the work of ACAE into positioning the aerospace theme in the collective imaginary of Costa Rican society.