

SPACE ACTIVITY AND SOCIETY (E5)
Space Expectations: How the Public Views Space Activities (2)

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INVESTIGATING PUBLIC SPACE EXPLORATION INTEREST AND SUPPORT IN THE UK

Abstract

Despite recent reports stressing that the UK should play a full and active role in both robotic and human space exploration and that such involvement is crucial to engage society in the excitement of space discovery, the UK government keeps its long-standing opposition to participation in human space missions. Space agencies such as NASA and ESA have ambitious programmes of science and discovery that mark the dawn of a new era in space exploration where humans will be sent to the Moon again and to Mars; an era that requires the public support. Space agencies, institutions and societies, as the Royal Astronomical Society in the UK, want to ensure that the actual UK government's position does not become the reason for public disinterest and the end of support for space exploration. This study shows that the British public consider the advancement of UK space activities both nationally and internationally to be of interest. Over 700 Britons were surveyed at two scientific events in the UK and through a web questionnaire that circulated among academics to determine their opinions and attitudes to space exploration. The in-situ surveys were conducted in 2008 at the Royal Society Summer Exhibition in London and at the Leicester Space Centre in Leicester. When asked about means to explore space, the majority agrees that space should be explored by both mankind and machines arguing that the most important reason to explore space is to generate new scientific knowledge and advance human culture. Although, there are some concerns about risk and cost, the greater number of supporters say that more money should be allocated to civil space activities. This paper will investigate the interest and support of the British in space exploration and how it relates to shaping and framing of government's space policy. We will discuss the purpose of public engagement in science policy, and the ability, on behalf of policy-makers, to understand and utilize the outcomes of such engagement activities in the governance of science and technology.