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STOP THE MADNESS! WHY “COMMERCIAL” SPACE DOESN’T EXIST

Abstract

The thesis of this paper is that the concept of a “commercial” space industry means too many different things to different people (i.e., is highly ambiguous) and, therefore, does not exist in a positivist sense. This paper will show that, within the United States (as a case study) and between other countries around the world, there is little agreement upon a clear definition of the many attributes of a “commercial firm” (such as degree of government equity ownership of the firm, or degree of government control over the firm’s goals) or the threshold metrics to determine “commercial” status (such as “to be considered ‘commercial’ a firm must have less than 50 percent government ownership”). The confusion caused by a lack of a clear definition for the word “commercial” increases when investigating (1) the many types of a “commercial” transaction, and (2) the characteristics of government and commercial entities. In an attempt to “stop the madness” created by this excessive and compounding ambiguity, a baseline set of “commercial” characteristics are identified (although no attempt is made to delineate the threshold metrics that distinguish “commercial” from “non-commercial” activities or entities) and a culturally-neutral (i.e. ‘etic’) categorization of entities is proposed.