Values and New Models for Space Exploration (10)
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PUBLIC INTEREST AND THE STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHY OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM AND BEYOND

Abstract

Public space agencies, representing the public interest, are set to remain the core agents in the development of our collective relationship with the solar system —and, increasingly, other solar systems as well— as we continue to explore the cosmos through human spaceflight missions and robotic probes. Our exploration activities take place within a unique physical geography but our explorations are nonetheless governed by the same types of human relationships that exist and develop between people and places everywhere. A group of NASA social scientists, researchers, and contractors undertook a project – a large infographic entitled 'Strategic Geography of the Solar System and Beyond' - to articulate a new perspective on the options for space strategy that centered around public, popular culture, and historical interest values for space exploration. The result is an infographic representation of the geography of exploration that lies before us with narrative descriptions highlighting aspects of the human relationships and human geography that have long-run strategic implications for consideration.

The discipline of geography, the study of the relationships between people and places, offers techniques that can provide useful insight into the strategies that will allow us to manage the political, economic, cultural forces that provide the motivation and resources for our efforts. There are two broad classes of geographic analysis: physical geography and human geography. Human geography, the primary focus of this effort, encompasses physical, cultural, and economic considerations.

This strategic geography considers outer space from a human interest perspective beyond the traditional focal areas of scientific discovery and technology development. It challenges the viewer to think of the solar system and beyond as a natural environment filled with diverse worlds and geographies with which humanity is in the process of developing economic and cultural relationships and in which there are resources that can be used to advance and support our collective interests.