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International cooperation in using space for sustainable development: Towards a “Space2030” agenda (1)

Author: Ms. Luisa Santoro
Italian Space Agency (ASI), Italy, luisa.santoro@asi.it

NUDGING TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Abstract

As repeatedly underlined during meetings and fora around the globe, the Space 2030 Agenda should, among other equally important objectives, aim at bridging the “Space Divide” and fostering collaborations between space and non-space actors by building upon existing frameworks and/or developing new ones. To this regard, a new perspective for international cooperation in space activities benefiting the Space 2030 Agenda could be provided by “Nudge”, the theory developed in the first decade of 2000 by Nobel laureate behavioral economist Richard Thaler and law scholar Cass Sunstein. Their findings from behavioral sciences and their applications in policy making, indeed, represent a widely recognized new way to develop a more effective institutional governance for the promotion of sustainable behaviors. A new approach that could be adopted even for the creation of a diffused space society by developing nudge-based initiatives that could result in better connections of societies to space-related benefits, as well as in ensuring that those benefits be accessible to everyone at any time.

After a short description of how behavioral sciences actually help policy-makers to understand human behaviors and, thus, to conceive and design more effective policies, this paper will focus on the term “nudge” as intended by Thaler and Sunstein, with particular attention to the role of choice architecture and nudging in inspiring individuals to act or make choices in a desired direction. Success factors and limitations of nudging will be examined, too.

A short description of how the Nudge theory is actually being applied - in Italy and other European and non-European Countries- will, then, be provided, to show how it can complement (governmental, regional and global) strategies aimed to help individuals make better decisions for themselves and society as a whole, thus contributing to promote a variety of sustainable behaviors and also highlighting the fact that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the attainment of the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) are a country-led process that necessarily requires political steering and oversight.

The final section of the paper will take into consideration and propose some potential applications of nudging in the space field, showing - once again since the beginning of the space age - that both intra- and inter-governmental cooperation will prove instrumental to effectively address the global challenges posed by the Space 2030 Agenda.