

Transcending Societal Issues for Space Exploration (12)
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SUSTAINABLE SPACE GOVERNANCE: LEGITIMACY TRADE-OFFS AND TRADE-INS FOR MARS SETTLEMENT

Abstract

Exploring space requires not only innovative technical solutions but also new formats of human organizing, management and governance. With the focus given to effective and safe existence of bases and outposts in the outer space, new governance models will require difficult decisions about the basic human rights and values to ensure their sustainability. And while small crews of Apollo-like missions required a simple top-down hierarchy, larger long-term bases of hundreds of people will represent a complex society with a more complex governance regime. Ensuring legitimacy, understood in Max Weber's sense as the acceptance of political authority, will determine the long-term sustainability of such arrangements. There are different sources of legitimacy that are usually split along the fault lines of the democratic dilemma, between effectivity and democratic participation. Legitimacy in form of acceptance of political authority can be based on effective, fast-tracked, expert-based and exclusive problem-solving, as well as on acceptance by the system truly reflecting the persons' interests through their inclusive and democratic participation. The harsh environment will likely prioritize effectivity, expert rule, and survival over democratic participation and human rights that might complicate, slow down and problematize the decision-making processes. However, ensuring that the preferences and needs of the subjects living at the Mars settlement are reflected is not only a question of morality and ethics but also of long-term sustainability. In the ever-changing and difficult environment, social cohesion and preferences of all subjects will be key for the sustainability of a Martian society. Further, food intentions are hardly a source of legitimacy and can never substitute for representation. Scientific facts and observations come hardly at a format of policy options and even scientists are not free of bias and social phenomenon affecting their opinions. These hard questions will be answered in different contexts on Mars. Different goals will require different sources of legitimacy, or different tools to ensure the acceptance of the political authority by the subjects. And while there can be trade-offs between different goals and different types of legitimacy, there are can also be trade-ins, in which various practices of deriving acceptance of the governing system are mutually supportive. This paper firstly introduces two distinct understandings of legitimacy from sociological and political perspectives and existing legitimacy trade-offs on Earth. Building upon this background, the paper then discusses what legitimacy trade-offs would a long-term sustainable Martian base likely face.