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Is Space R&D Truly Fostering A Better World For Our Future? (2)

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PUBLIC VALUE IN THE SPACE SECTOR: ESA CASE

Abstract

Space is an enabler for growth and innovation, the results and applications deriving from its use, have macro and micro benefits worldwide. It is spanning so many areas that it is difficult to find the one single value for space and while most of the space community is aware of the benefits generated, it might be less obvious to the general public. A public value approach to an assessment of an organisation raises new questions about its performance and brings voice and values, of the public into the policy process. Hence, this collaborative research project under the auspices of ESA LAB at UCLan sought to provide a comprehensive analysis and framework for the measurement of wider perceived public value of space agencies like the European Space Agency (ESA). The conceptual framework draws upon a distinctive synthesis of theories of public value, human values and needs. The approach is centred around the perception of an organisation by reasonable, informed citizens assessed against a comprehensive and inclusive set of human value categories (Schwartz, 2012). Ultimately, a mapping against this full set of human value categories reveals the public value profile of space agencies like ESA. This quantitative and qualitative case study utilise a specific methodology of public value measurement. 403 questionnaires comprised of 19 questions were used to survey a sample of informed citizens coming mostly from France and Italy. The approach probed perceptions of ESA in respect with citizen's beliefs about the organisation's contribution to value in the public sphere through the lens of the totality of human values. The findings reveal a very significant level of perceived contribution of ESA to the public sphere. Using the European Social Survey, a quantitative analysis was performed to confront ESA results with the public value priorities of the citizens. Outcomes of this research helped highlight how ESA may position itself as a public value organisation. Moreover, it enabled the development of a portable and scalable Public Value framework that can be transposed to space sector's organisations and used in order to reach real-world impact across sectors and societies. Given the democratic nature of Space for Earth activities, and the importance of the public perception of ESA's value among funders and stakeholders, this research gives a fuller appreciation of the overall value of ESA and space activities.