IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Enabling the Future - Developing the Space Workforce (5)

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IDEATION IN SPACE BUSINESS APPLICATIONS: THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE HACKATHON ACTINSPACE CASE

Abstract

Launched by CNES (the French government space agency) in 2014 and supported by ESA since 2016, ActInSpace aims at fostering entrepreneurship in space applications, especially among young people. Midway between a start-up weekend and a hackathon, ActInSpace enables teams with different profiles from different regions of the world to take up, in just 24 hours, one of the challenges set up by CNES, ESA and their partners.

Since the 1st edition, ActInSpace hackers have created about 35 start-ups in the different host countries. One of the distinguishing features in this competition is the fact that the challenges are based on CNES and ActInSpace partner's patents or space data.

As the objective is to open the access of space solution for everyone, CNES and its partners spend a lot of efforts to make space solutions accessible through the proposed challenges to all participants whatever their background.

The 4th edition has been held in November 2020 in a complicated sanitary and economical context. The hackathon adapted by implementing a hybrid organization: physical virtual mode. This allowed ActInSpace to reach new records: 2300 hackers from 40 countries, among them 1/3 of women, joined this edition.

This forced organizers to rethink the ideation process, reconsidering what it means and what it takes to innovate effectively in a virtual participation mode. How to keep making the space solutions accessible and understandable, given this new conditions, was also a major issue. Amid the challenges, the organizers had to faced: the management of the interaction between business space experts and the participants, the selection of a relevant tool to enable both innovation in virtual mode and the pitch sessions while taking into account confidentiality and the time zone.

The results of the ActInSpace 2020 edition will be presented and used to enlighten how ideation takes place in the field of space applications and what are the impacts of virtualization on the ideation process.

Finally, plans for the next edition which will take place in connection with IAC 2022 will be discussed. This should be an incredible opportunity to involve even more partners and experts to help prepare the space downstream application workforce of tomorrow.