

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)  
Calling Planet Earth: Large Engagement and Communications Initiatives (6)

Author: Mrs. Chiara Limardi  
ASI - Italian Space Agency, Italy

Dr. Silvia Ciccarelli  
Italian Space Agency (ASI), Italy  
Mr. Paolo D'Angelo  
Italy

THE NEW VOYAGER: ASTRONAUTS AND THE MODERN MYTH OF SPACE EXPLORATION

**Abstract**

What does space exploration mean for the “global” generations of Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996) and Zoomers (those born between 1997 and 2012)? Is it now possible to create an internationally shared narrative on astronauts and their space endeavors based on social norms and cultural values perceived as mainstream to Millennials and Zoomers? This paper intends to explore the prospects of structuring an updated, global mythology of space exploration and the potential characteristics of the new ideal astronaut following the changes in national cultures and social myths due to globalization and the widespread of high technology worldwide. To better address plausible ways and means of a feasible international narrative on space exploration in the future, such as the personalization of storytelling and the use of social media, this study focuses on the analysis of four national depictions – or lack thereof, of astronauts through the history of space exploration portrayed by the American, the Indian, the Italian, and the Japanese media, as the U.S. and Italy represent the Atlantic and the European areas, respectively; India and Japan account for the growing importance of Asia in the New Space Age. As these four countries also have traditionally different social norms and cultural values, they serve as the perfect case studies to understand to what extent the international space community will be able to present a universally shared, modern mythology of space exploration and human endeavors in space due to societal changes happening in all the national societies taken into consideration by this analysis. Indeed, since all the national narratives on space exploration have successfully used the individual performances and personalities of the single astronaut to appeal to specific and highly shared national cultural and societal myths through the decades since the beginning of the First Space Age, are these portrayals still widely evocative to younger, “globalized” nationals, or have they washed out entirely due to new standards of communications and social norms being more diffused among Millennials and Zoomers regardless of their nationality? This article wishes to find concrete, although preliminary, answers that could help to shape a renovated imagery of astronauts and space exploration that could spark inspiration and passion for outer space in the two generations who are coming of age in the New Space Era, using philosophical concepts and sociological interpretations as tools to seek out a common, meaningful language for the international space community.