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STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS AS AN INNOVATION CATALYST FOR COMPANIES AND START-UPS:
THE POLISPACE CASE

Abstract

The present paper aims to discuss the critical role that a student association plays in the evolution and innovation of the Space Economy sector. Given the absence of previous research focused on this topic, this paper exploits the unique perspective of a student-based association to deliver a methodical analysis of the impact made by the student space association PoliSpace. The organizational structure of PoliSpace, together with its core values and goals, is thoroughly depicted to allow for a better understanding of the framework presented. Particular focus has been placed on the nominal interactions between the association and its business partners: a qualitative, and where feasible quantitative, analysis is used to characterise the economic arm of PoliSpace's efforts. Subsequently, and most importantly, the report studies the pivotal role that the association plays in empowering students to foster their entrepreneurial vocation. The association has birthed two intriguing start-ups in recent years, Sun-Cubes and FAST Aerospace. Their development path is rigorously examined, with special attention given to the Pre-Seed phase that unfolded inside PoliSpace. A series of interviews with critical figures representing these start-ups is used to narrate their point of view, complemented by the critical input of third-party experts in the sector. Through a critical assessment of the matters previously discussed, the report draws conclusions on the role of student-based associations in the space sector and proposes a roadmap to strengthen the association's capability to help the development of start-ups. The research indicates the need to continue investing efforts in student associations to boost their capability to produce innovation: the economic phenomena described hereafter are a vital contribution to the progress of the Space Sector and must be effectively supported.