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FOSTERING INNOVATIVE EARTH OBSERVATION SOLUTIONS THROUGH  
COMMERCIALISATION: ESA'S ZERO-EQUITY FUNDING PROGRAM

**Abstract**

The space sector and in particular Earth Observation is undergoing a profound transformation triggered by a confluence of factors, including technological advances, increasing data availability and an upsurge in entrepreneurship and private investment interest.

One of the five pillar priorities of the European Space Agency (ESA) for the next years is to boost the commercialisation of space activities and applications to foster a green and digital Europe. The Agency aims to benefit from the growing space economy and interact more effectively with start-ups and established companies to help them develop their ideas. One of the routes through which this is done in the EO sector is via the ESA  $\Phi$ -lab and the InCubed programme, ESA's initiative for a flexible zero-equity co-financing model to support both upstream and downstream business ideas.

InCubed works according to three basic principles: prioritizing commercial viability, encouraging innovation and involving customers engagement from the beginning of the project to qualify the business case and ensure that the focus is on tangible market outcomes. In addition, it incentivizes disruptive approaches that push the boundaries of marketable applications and provides individual mentoring for each project to facilitate the development and validation of such innovative EO solutions.

With more than 100 projects in its portfolio, InCubed is a testament to ESA's commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and driving commercialisation in the space sector. By leveraging Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and prioritizing market-driven innovation, InCubed is able to foster the future of EO technology, market and push the space industry to new frontiers of economic growth and sustainability.

The objective of the paper is to showcase the achievements obtained by the InCubed program, demonstrating its positive impact on the European EO ecosystem.