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BEYOND INCUBATION: SHAPING EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY'S SUPPORT FRAMEWORKS  
FOR SPACE VENTURES

**Abstract**

In the rapidly evolving New Space Economy, the transition from government-led to private enterprise space initiatives necessitates innovative support structures for emerging ventures. This study critically examines the needs of this evolving new space ecosystem and forwards a comprehensive proposal to extend the current European Space Agency's (ESA) Business Incubation Centers (ESA BICs) with an ESA Accelerator framework, to cater to the specific needs of space startups. It highlights the shift towards a commercial and privately funded sector, underlining the importance of incubators and accelerators in space venture growth and advocating for a specialized acceleration approach. Employing a mixed-methods approach, including a qualitative case study of ESA BICs, interviews with ESA stakeholders, and surveys of space venture founders, the research aims to understand the existing support framework and assess the startups' suitability for incubation and acceleration. Thus, a strategic acceleration model is proposed, featuring customized support services, including funding, mentorship, market access, and technical guidance, aimed at propelling space ventures toward sustainable commercial success. This research contributes to the academic dialogue on space entrepreneurship and support mechanisms, offering a clearer understanding of the distinction between incubation and acceleration in the New Space Economy. It offers actionable insights for the ESA and similar entities on enhancing their support frameworks for space startups, thereby promoting innovation, and economic growth, and strengthening the European space sector's global standing.