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LEVERAGING THE SOFT POWER OF SPACE SCIENCE IN EUROPE

Abstract

The term “soft power”, despite the magmatic definition, generally refers to a country’s ability to position itself on the international scene without the use of coercion; rather, the cultural ideals and values of a nation extend across borders to lead and strengthen partnerships. A number of factors contribute to making up the notion of soft power, from international prestige to social cohesion, in addition to inspirational elements.

Whilst human spaceflight has historically witnessed such power, with some more recent reinvigoration, the soft power of space science has often been overlooked and is worth further consideration. This should be aimed at improving the positive impact of space science missions on politics, diplomacy, international relations and society as a whole, by making use of their value beyond scientific indicators.

This paper will illustrate the soft power dimension of space science through relevant historical examples, which resonated beyond the achievement of their primary scientific objectives. The analysis is complemented by a semi-quantitative assessment of the soft power potential shown by the selected missions, resulting in several reflections on the current selection mechanisms of science missions in Europe and elsewhere. In this regard, regional peculiarities and good practices are highlighted, as well as insights into the emerging trends in the prioritization of scientific missions.

Finally, the outcomes of the research, coupled with tailored consultations with relevant stakeholders active in this field, will allow:

- Several considerations to be ideally integrated in the selection of future space science mission, to maximise the soft power potential of these activities,
- Reflections on the prioritisation of major topics of investigation based on criteria beyond their scientific interest,
- A number of policy recommendations for the scientific community on the improvement of their engagement with policy makers.