

Moon, planets, orbits and charity - think egregious!

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Competitions for the best ideas and innovations in the area of space science and technology are common throughout the space-faring countries in Europe. Yet despite these and other forceful PR instruments to promote space in general, a great part of the public still lacks interest in, and support of, space endeavours. Especially human space flight and planetary missions demand high budgets which are not always deemed appropriate by a considerable proportion of the voters in space-faring countries. Thus, in spite of the ample funds directed to the space sector, space activities in Europe still struggle with an image problem. Quite the opposite is true for the European charity sector, whose image is superb but which suffers from a lack of advertence and donations. The proposal put forward in this paper is hence to involve European charity organisations in public space activities, thereby combining funds with image and creating a win-win-situation where space technologies and charitable concerns are promoted at the same time. Although such a partnership may at first glance appear unusual, those who are concerned with space should be ready to step aside of well known paths, enter unknown terrain and think the unthinkable.

How space issues are perceived by the public in Europe

Space organisations in Europe must increase the overall public acceptance of space activities. More and more countries in Europe regard space as an important strategic and innovative domain. However, according to the changing phases of the political life cycle, the amount of time and funds dedicated to space applications and space research varies greatly in Europe, which does not go unnoticed by the public. Moreover, there is the ever-hovering question of whether the ample funds set aside for space missions are justified when in many European countries, people regard their prosperity as jeopardised by economic crises. National governments, national space agencies and the European Space Agency (ESA) should be concerned about the lingering question of the compatibility of space budgets with societal demands, particularly regarding the non-application areas like planetary missions.

Notwithstanding the above, the expectations of the European public regarding space are not entirely known. National surveys on how populations perceive their country's space activities are available, but an overall picture is missing. The International Academy of

Astronautics,¹ in cooperation with ESA, is currently conducting a study on "Space Expectations." The overall goal is to enable a merging of the technological/scientific goals of space activities with societal expectations. The results should lead to space programmes that arouse more public interest and contact with the European populations. Nonetheless, issues of space and society are still pending an up-to-date. Therefore, in autumn 2008, the European Space Policy Institute (ESPI) in Vienna will host a workshop on "The Fair and Responsible Use of Space" with partners such as the IAA and the Secure World Foundation.²

Although the tradition of PR in the space domain has not yet led to a visible popularity of space activities in Europe, space science and technology have a strong base in Europe. In order to achieve more competition and PR in the space domain at the national, European and global level, awards for the best ideas, efforts or innovations in the area of space technology are frequent in all European states involved in space research or activities. The

¹ See: International Academy of Astronautics homepage: <http://www.iaaweb.org>.

² See: Secure World Foundation homepage: <http://secureworldfoundation.org/mainc.php?ax=01&ay=00>.

winners are typically rewarded with grants, donations, publicity, or other in-kind benefits. For instance, the European Space Agency has created a competition called the “European Satellite Navigation Competition,” sponsored by ESA’s Technology Transfer Programme (TTP). The winner of 2008 is called the “Carbon Hero” and participates in the tracking of a person’s individual carbon footprint via an innovative device and mobile phone when using different means of transportation.³ The “Carbon Hero” innovation is designated for being used with Galileo. Another type of award aims at quality media reports about space issues in general.⁴ One of the underlying reasons for such a type of award is the promotion of public attention and understanding of space issues at the national level.

The described approaches are frequently practised in Europe and are successful in terms of a direct, practical benefit for space science and space applications. But they do not boost public acceptance of space activities in general.

Charity – the tradition in Europe

What space and charity organisations have in common is that their activities are directed towards the improvement of life and the future of mankind. Private, international and religious charity organisations have been active in Europe for centuries. Typically, they appeal to the benevolence and sympathy of private citizens. Much success is expected when a celebrity from politics, the show-business or academia becomes involved in an appeal for donations. Even single charity events organised for selected groups or the public are by now capable of raising large amounts of money for a predefined and publicised charity purpose. Arts and music events play a particularly crucial role in raising funds for charity projects, since they involve enjoyable experiences and attract many people. However, even more potential donors could be attracted if charity events or projects were able to harness the wide-spread fascination for technology and space missions. The beneficiaries of such partnerships between charity and space actors could be smaller or larger groups of citizens who are in need of public, financial, organisational or even ethical interest and support. Examples of such groups are trusts for life-limited children,⁵ groups

promoting the concerns of the elderly⁶ or organisations for uncommon diseases.⁷ Service clubs and the Red Cross can also be called charity organisations in a broader sense.

A set of preliminary ideas for linking space and charity

First notion: Human space flight and space transportation are highly visible and exert a fascination on many people, disregarding age. In the event of another ATV flight to the ISS, European citizens could dispense a strand of their hair that would – together with thousands or more hairs of other people and for a predefined amount of money (e.g. 100 €) – be placed in a transparent block form.⁸ The dimension of the block would have to be agreed upon so that it would not take up too much space on the ATV. The material of the transparent block would have to comply with space standards. The block could then be placed on the ISS. A similar block could be ejected by a moon orbiter, or be anchored in the ground by a lander mission. Even for future planetary missions, such a scenario could be taken into consideration.

Any kind of personal item would have to address the non-contamination principle for celestial bodies. A charity organisation involved in such an appeal could be an organisation for orphans or a hospice organisation, for instance. The donation revenue would then benefit orphans or ill children in one or more European countries.

Second notion: Besides exploratory missions, telecommunication platforms in near-Earth orbit could be the object of a combined effort of a charity organisation and a national space agency or ESA: A day or weekend of transmitted personal messages – of course with a predefined range of topics with ethical boundaries – from a European or national TV-satellite communication platform. European citizens would pay for each word and the name to be transmitted. The selection of the participating charity organisations could be aided by the European Commission. Ideal partners would be organisations working for citizens who cannot communicate without aid like deaf or deaf-mute people. Even the sponsoring of a message from one of the

³ See: “Carbon Hero” homepage:

<http://www.carbonhero.net/Intro.html>.

⁴ For instance, EADS donated the “Ludwig-Bölkow” prize for journalists who wrote outstanding reports on space issues.

⁵ See: Acorns Children Hospice Trust homepage: <http://www.acorns.org.uk/>.

⁶ See: Age Concern homepage:

<http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/>.

⁷ See: Behçet’s Syndrome Society homepage:

<http://www.behcets.org.uk/>.

⁸ Made of polyethylene or derived materials, for instance.

beneficiaries could be taken into consideration.

Third notion: A planetary mission to Mars requires a long lead time, normally close to a decade. Once it is certain that a planetary mission will be launched, ESA – in cooperation with the European Commission – could carefully select a partnering charity organisation. Relief for the handicap or discrimination affecting the charity organisation's beneficiary group should only be foreseeable in the mid-term, as is the case with the eradication of the HIV/AIDS epidemic affecting Europe and particularly Africa, for instance. An organisation like the Red Cross or Médicines Sans Frontières would thus be a suitable partner for a joint venture between ESA and a charitable organisation, not least because large organisations are capable of handling the logistics involved in such a project. For a predefined donation, European citizens could transmit a message of a certain size to a recorder provided for the mission. Through space or in the orbit of the destination planet, these messages could then be played. This way, both ESA and the participating charity organisation could promote their activities, while HIV/AIDS patients in Africa would profit from the donations raised through a planetary space mission.

Fourth notion: The possible enhancement of the European ATV to a return vehicle could provide another opportunity for transporting personal items of European citizens to and from the ISS. These items would serve as personal wish items that then return "ISS-ised" to the donator, and might include dried and pasteurised leaves (low weight!) from garden trees and bushes, or flowers, among others. The charity organisation receiving the transport fees for the items could be a union helping blind people in Europe, for example.

The aforementioned examples indicate that the collaborating organisations and beneficiary groups would have to be selected with much diligence. The question of who would initialise the selection process is also pivotal for the success of a cooperation project between space and charity actors.

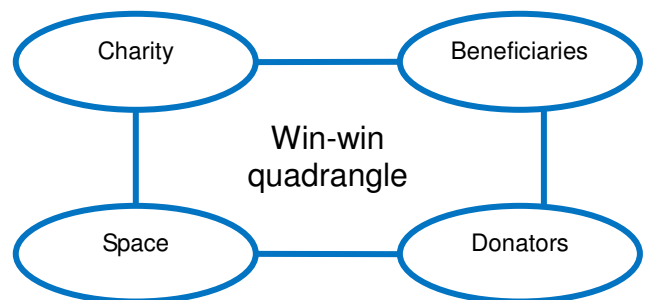
Europe should be the first to combine space with charity

There are several arguments in favour of an alliance between space and charity. The recurring question of the justification of high expenditures for space missions and especially

astronautic space missions will loose ground

- when these missions are associated with a visible and direct profit for a large beneficiary group represented by a nationally or globally accredited and publicly esteemed charity organisation;
- by attracting the audience commonly interested in the charity domain, and evoking curiosity and understanding among people who would normally not be interested in space issues;
- because a link or even bond would be created between the goals of space missions and the concerns or hardships of groups who are to become the beneficiaries of the space-created benefits.

A successful alliance of space and charity would enhance the overall acceptance and promotion of space activities. Even space applications which have long become a part of everyday life such as satellite television would be boosted further by a change in public opinion. A successful space-charity project could thus be conceptualised as a quadrangle of benefit.



Each corner of the quadrangle represents an entity which profits: The *beneficiaries* because they receive direct help in the form of financial aid or logistic support; the *charity organisation* because of the publicity received for its cause; the citizens who take the part of *donors* and receive an enthralling gift, and whose reach for the stars has become reality; and last but not least the *European space community* which would be able to shake off its image as a merely scientifically and commercially driven domain which neglects social realities.

In order for both actors – charity organisations and space agencies – to act in concert, a common understanding regarding the goals, means and broad framework of the joint public relations activities must be found. The ESA Ministerial Council, as a representative of the space community in Europe, would be well-suited for inviting the heads of major European charity organisations and umbrella

organisations for a first brainstorming during an ice-breaking event.

A recurring warning

A partnership between space and charity should not be intertwined with commercial interests or the advertising of special products. Also, space tourism is not (yet) an adequate area for providing a platform for charity. The considerable sum of money which has to be raised for a trip into space for one's own pleasure is unsuitable for being combined with charity projects. Commercially organised space-charity projects might jeopardise or dilute the originally intended purpose. Moreover, to avoid conflict with different religious stakeholders or even the groups of beneficiaries, an affiliation with religious charity organisations should not on any account be taken into consideration.

How to start to think egregious

The aforementioned ideas and proposals may already have been pondered by some persons involved in space affairs or charity. However, the very thought of a space-charity collaboration might impede its being uttered, as it seems impossible to accomplish and not adequate for space science purposes. It is also true and obvious that other space-related problems demand more urgent solutions. Nevertheless, space flight would gain many advantages from a successful 'planets and charity' project. Not yet in history has a single nation or Europe dared such a big step.

A first small step in the right direction was made by the Germany based RapidEye AG⁹: The launch of the five Earth Observation satellites of the RapidEye AG last August was linked to a name giving contest for these five satellites. The participants in the contest donated money in order to see their proposals for satellite names on the contest list. The gains of the contest go to a local foundation which conducts a project against xenophobia aiming at more tolerance¹⁰.

A first generic step towards a win-win situation would be to resolve doubts against taking the space issue to a completely different societal level. To associate space with charity for a particular mission project demands new ways of handling the space issue.

The kick-off should be started by an EU and ESA cooperative approach. The EU is the future user of space applications and ESA is the research and implementing organisation. The screening of possible organisational partners would include the setting-up of criteria for charity organisations potentially suited for such projects, for instance regarding their capacity to handle the necessary logistics. The charity organisations themselves should, in coordination with ESA, the EU and/or national actors, hand in proposals indicating target groups for specific joint projects, taking not least into consideration that the beneficiary groups must have a critical mass in order to make the *win-win-quadrangle* a reality.

*A journey of a thousand miles
begins with one step.*

⁹ RapidEye AG: <http://www.rapideye.de/>

¹⁰ Stiftung Gollwitz: <http://www.stiftunggollwitz.de/>

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