

European Identity Through Space: Transdisciplinary Investigations

“Project Europe” can only succeed on the basis of a clear common European identity. European space activities are a building block for this existential mission by safeguarding our political, economic and cultural well-being.

Creating and shaping European identity through space is not the task only of engineers and scientists. It is a holistic endeavour comprising all academic and societal communities and encompassing all identified cognate disciplines in a transdisciplinary effort.

Three distinct “spaces” can be identified:

European Identity and Global Politics: How space technologies and applications are influenced by, and in turn create a consciousness of Europeanness.

European Identity and the Field of Culture: How space, through the help of the humanities, creates other realities that disregard boundaries.

The Future of European Identity: How space can be used as an instrument for strengthening European identity and how, in turn, European identity may change under the influence of space exploration.

The potential of space for enhancing European identity is far from having been realised. Structuring and substantiating the benefits under these three “spaces” will contribute to their growing impact.

European Identity Through Space: The Conference

Under the auspices of the Swedish EU Presidency, ESPI organised the conference “European Identity Through Space” on 12-13 November 2009 in Vienna, Austria. It was the first transdisciplinary approach to discussing space and its implications for shaping a European identity. At this event, European space policy experts met with representatives from the humanities for a wide-ranging dialogue at ESPI, where open-minded, creative discussions and joint efforts for a stronger Europe are encouraged and realised.



Audience at the conference

Participants in the conference included speakers from European academic institutions, politics, industry as well as international organisations. The results of the conference will be published in the series “Studies in Space Policy” edited by ESPI and published by SpringerWienNewYork. This flyer summarises the main results of the conference for use in policy debates.



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European Identity Through Space

Keywords for the Future



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First Space

European Identity and Global Politics

How space technologies and applications create an underlying consciousness of Europeanness

International Context – The globalisation of European values and ideas can contribute to worldwide progress towards peace. The concept of Europe is rooted in but not restricted to the continent and its classical implications. The extension towards outer space and the major role of Europe in civilian space exploration inspire both cultural and technological achievements. Europe thus functions as a positive example and also a driver towards a global identity.

Technology – Ariane serves today as a prestigious symbol for numerous European cultural, scientific, technological and industrial achievements. Technological leadership and joint peaceful use of new possibilities support the implementation of a European identity that is aware of the benefits of space.

Applications – Europe's new and increasing role in international relations and as a leader in technological development is directly linked with major initiatives in space. Joint projects such as Galileo or GMES clearly demonstrate the significant role of independent European capabilities that, at the same time, stimulate global endeavours.

Security – Europe has changed from a continent of conflict to a union of peace. The view from space can bring a new awareness and tools for matters of internal and external security: Space has a security dimension and security has a space dimension. A positive and principled European space identity could play a formative role for a space related approach towards worldwide peace.

Second Space

European Identity and the Field of Culture

How space, through the help of the humanities, creates other realities which disregard Boundaries

Philosophy – Europe is a desire and an idea - a passage from fear to hope. Europeanness, based on the philosophical concept of universalism, means transgressing frontiers and redefining relations between territories, limits and mobility. This never-ending intellectual curiosity, the process of identity formation and the longing for scientific progress, are reflected in its space ambitions.

The Arts – Europe is not only a leading pioneer of technological progress but also of passion and dreams. The arts, in all their diversity and historical dimensions, through their imaginative powers stimulate science and fiction well beyond conventional thinking. Examples such as the figurine "Cosmic dancer" encourage new ideas and communicate hard facts to a broader public in a unique way.

Education – Space works as a catalyst for diverse interests in science and research in many different educational programmes. Younger European generations can be reached and sensitised to engineering and science in general as well as to the social sciences through icons such as European astronauts.

Science Communication – Communication about European space policy, space activities and related topics can be carried out via best practice networks, public events and educational programmes. These efforts should be optimised through European think tanks and specially trained Public Information Officers. They can provide a professional link between the scientific community and the public.

Third Space

The Future of European Identity

How space can be used as an instrument for strengthening European identity

Dialogue – The European approach towards the future of joint space efforts needs to be transdisciplinary. Promoting space needs the involvement of new actors from the policy areas as well as from different scientific and cultural disciplines. The clear intention must be: distribution of European space achievements; further integration of space related topics in all relevant discussions; and the implementation or encouragement of vital forums for ensuring these dialogues on a European level.

Reflection – A better understanding of space will help to overcome boundaries. The European aerospace industry is a good example of the successful implementation of cross border cooperation and can stand as a role model. Corporate identity in space can lead to a corporate identity in Europe on a more general level.

Process – Europe is going through a permanent process of change: historically, geographically and geopolitically. It is an evolution which has to be revealed in a public, comparative and vivid discussion. The European space effort can act as a model case.

Visions – European space accomplishments are an anchor of European identity. Europe is a major actor in global politics, especially when it comes to space efforts. It is the best example of European coherence and a clear signal of its international competitive power. All areas of European life, ranging from politics to economics, from education to the arts, can benefit from our performance in space.