

Space Science for Societal Challenges

22-23 October 2020, Lorentz Center @Oort (online)

Scientific

Short description of the aims for the virtual meeting

The main aim was to bring together experts from space research, industry, education and public engagement fields worldwide in an atmosphere where they can discuss and find common grounds regarding societal challenges and discuss collaboration within the sector. An important focus was on the potential for a new “Space-KIC” (Knowledge and Innovation Community) for each sub-community, as an example of a structure that supports the sharing of knowledge, expertise and opportunities. Discussion of alternative structures for collaboration within the sector to share best practices was another aim.

Short summary of key moments (key debates, breakthroughs, etc.)

The workshop started with 2 plenary sessions to set the scene and introduce key topics, followed by 4 sessions targeted to specific communities within the sector (industry, research, education and public engagement), and closing plenary again. One of the more important talks was by Mari Vittoria D’Inzeo, representing the European Commission’s DG DEFIS (Defence Industry and Space). She identified challenges in the European Space Sector and asked the community to think about potential solutions during remaining sessions.

Outcome(s)

- Text-based input from all participants on polls to be included in a report.
- Sharing of best practices and knowledge within and between communities of different stakeholders in the space sector. Especially the latter is of importance to the sector as these communities are not often bridged.
- Proposed ideas during the workshop: investigate the establishment of a space for development office, making the existing Communicating Astronomy with the Public (CAP) conference broader to include space experts (astronomy and space are separate fields that are often disconnected).

Other comments

This workshop was organised by two EU-funded projects spaceEU and Our Space Our Future in response to a call from the European Commission, inquiring about the need for a Space-KIC or other models of collaboration in the European space sector.

Organization

Preparation (synchronous and asynchronous strategies)

We did not include asynchronous content because most key participants were quite high-level and indicated they did not have time to prepare, read or contribute prior to the session or beyond the scope of a normal talk and discussion. We included polling with open and closed questions to gather input from all participants. A moderation company (Evenflow) supported the preparation and implementation.

Duration of the workshop and time management

1,5 days (day 1: 9:30-17:00, day 2: 9:30-14:00) broken down in seven sessions of 1,5 hours). Several sessions targeted a subgroup of the participants so we would not ask too much of their time and

could expect their full attention in sessions where we needed it most. We compressed in 1.5 days instead of spreading it out over multiple weeks to maintain everyone's attention which is easily lost online. Timekeeping of talks was not optimal as moderators struggle to interrupt speakers. An automatic timer shown on the screen would be a better solution.

Platform(s) used before and during the workshop

Zoom & Mentimeter for interactive polling with help of a moderation company.

Short- and long-term plans for follow-up

Short term: a white paper, to be presented to the European Commission, as input from the space community to guide future policies. Connecting the participants of the workshop via a newsletter.

Long term: the idea was suggested to look into establishing a "Space for Development" office to complement the existing Astronomy for Development office.

Lessons learned for future virtual events

- There are great tools (like whiteboard environments) to enable interactivity, but these take a lot of time and planning which we underestimated and therefore didn't use.
- Session length of maximum 1.5 hours worked well
- 1.5 days was a good duration to keep people's attention in the age of Zoom fatigue.
- The second day, we allowed more contributions from the audience by speaking up, this worked well in this group size (~40 participants + organisers).
- It remains difficult to establish a sense of 'community' in the group, especially as people multitask and will not be active for multiple days in a row.
- A lot of the nice ideas on the 'Tips and Trick' document don't work as well for a multidisciplinary/multisectoral group of participants as we had (asynchronous content, social activities, getting that active, workshop mindset), because there is no sense of community yet, people don't speak the same 'language' and you need to bridge that first, while the participants may not even be fully dedicated to the workshop and doing other things at the same time.

Lorentz Center (virtual) Support

Comments/points for improvement for the Lorentz Center team.

Some of the procedures provided by Lorentz Center did not seem tailored to online workshops, e.g.: participants were still asked for hotel/flight arrangements when signing up, there were little recommendations for online tools to use (this is understandable as we all had to adapt to Covid-19, but should be smoothed out soon). It would be nice to have a list of checkpoints and very specific recommendations for online workshops to guide organisers.

Small detail: there were typos in the PDF programme distributed to participants, which also didn't have the nice visual identity of the poster.

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