

Transcending Societal Issues for Space Exploration (12)
Transcending Societal Issues for Space Exploration (3) (3)

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SPACE EXPLORATION AND THE IMAGINARIES OF LIVING IN A CLIMATE-CHANGING WORLD

Abstract

Over the years, space exploration has proved to possess an extraordinary potential for changing environmental perspectives on Earth. However, this ability of space to create new relationships with our own planet and to inspire narratives of environmental conservationism and climate action is undergoing a major transformation as a few spacefaring nations and commercial entities are unveiling plans to exploit extraterrestrial resources and set up space settlements. Today's space exploration is very likely to stimulate technological inventions and new ways of thinking about, relating to and acting on the climate crisis on Earth. It is also generating new imaginaries of climate change and resource extraction on other planets which could help humans become "a multi-planetary species". The cultural and sociotechnical assumptions underpinning current space endeavours are likely to shape social and environmental relations for years to come and enhance or hinder new possibilities for tackling climate change. However, we know little about how the current wave of space exploration is being culturally and socially produced and with what effects.

In this presentation, I introduce the main premises and questions of a new research project that is exploring the changing imaginaries of living from an anthropological perspective. In this research, we use ethnographic methods and set out to study how three main groups of stakeholders across all continents (space scientists, activists and communities living in the vicinity of space installations) imagine life and living in the challenging environmental conditions of this and other worlds. We focus on climate change and resource extraction to find out how people make sense of unfamiliar worlds and whether learning about these worlds can reshape how they think about their immediate environments. To accomplish this, we develop a new ethnographic tool of "planetary ethnography" and in this presentation, I invite other participants to discuss the main assumptions and potential effects of using ethnographic methods to explore the imaginaries and impacts of space exploration across multiple sites and scales.