

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Space Culture – Public Engagement in Space through Culture (9)

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DEVELOPING AN ANTI-COLONIAL PRACTICE: MOVING FROM CONVERSATION TO
STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WITHIN THE SPACE COMMUNITY

Abstract

Navigating questions around the future of space exploration will require cross-cultural conversations and a recognition that all peoples and cultures on Earth have a stake in how we engage in being Off-Earth. Currently, Western and Euro-centric systems dominate the way the space community engages in space exploration, technology development, and science in space. In 2021, the Space Enabled Research Group at the MIT Media Lab hosted a series of online webinars and a workshop on Indigenous Anti-Colonial Views on Human Activity in Space to discuss incorporating and centering Indigenous epistemologies and people in the space community and how to resist and replace colonial structures and tendencies. Post seminars and workshop a central question remains: how do these conversations turn into long-standing relationships that have a concrete impact on decision-making and technical practices related to space?

Ultimately, there is tension when engaging in conversations around anti-colonial thought while operating within institutions that are intertwined with the very systems being critiqued. This tension pervades multiple facets of operating within these structures, affecting the conceptualization, planning, facilitation, and reflection of conversations around Indigenous and anti-colonial views on human activity in space. By critically reflecting on the experience of formulating and facilitating the webinar series and workshop, using data collected from a survey of participants after the series, and learning from continued collaborations with Indigenous and anti-colonial scholars, this paper reflects on the presence of tension, and on how to make it a productive starting-point for institutional and structural change within the space community.