

New Partnerships?

Since I last wrote, one month ago, I have traveled to Japan with a group of EARSC member companies to explore co-operation with Japanese companies. A series of B2B meetings were organised with the support of the EU-Japan centre for industrial co-operation covering all aspects of space technology. I was pleased that EARSC could support this initiative as it has been a goal both to help companies develop new export business and to organise a first EARSC trade mission. There was a good interest all round and some optimism for new partnerships linked to EO services.

The business part of the trip was quite successful with some good and constructive meetings taking place over the 3 days which can hopefully lead to business for the companies concerned. On the other hand, on a personal basis, I extended the business trip into some holiday which was rather less successful as I spent most of the second week in bed with a strong dose of the flu. It is probably only the 5th time in over 35 years of business I have extended a business trip to take holiday and was a good reminder of why I do not normally do so!

Whilst I was away, I noticed that ESA has published an interesting call for commercial partners in space exploration. "[Calling new partners for exploring the moon and Mars](#)". The announcement was for a call for ideas to "assess how companies could join forces with ESA in novel partnerships".

This is excellent and in the domain of EO we also need to find new ways of doing things. Is this a model? I guess that there are two views; one that says commercial ventures are best done away from any constraints of agencies or governments and the second that says, given the strong interest of governments and their agencies in the sector, we should find new ways to bring together the strengths of both. I definitely fall into the latter camp and take the view, for example, that the public sector investment in Copernicus represents a great opportunity for the private sector. Nevertheless, we see the heavy constraints that this brings and the difficulty to find the modalities and instruments to make it work.

New partnerships and ways of working together are needed and in particular a recognition from the governments that their role is to create the right environment for success. What does this really mean? It depends on what we understand by the government task!

I would see two key responsibilities here. The first is to ensure that the policy makers have the right tools and information available on which to base sound design and implementation of policy; we can think about security of the citizen and a sustainable environment. The second is to create conditions for economic well-being; we can think about employment and economic security of the citizens. Is it then necessary for governments to own the system to deliver this information? Not necessarily if the delivery can be assured by other means; ie through long term contracts etc.

Yet various views exist on what this can mean and hence a dialogue is necessary to find the right balance. This is normal as various interests exist and as I wrote in an earlier blog "[New business models \(revisited\)](#)", sometimes both time and aid is necessary to adapt from an existing status to a new one driven by new technologies, ways of doing business etc. We are pleased to have started a number of discussions with agencies responsible for the delivery of Copernicus services and are optimistic that this can lead to some long term planning and realistic partnerships. But this must be developed into a broader platform and for this we definitely need to work with both ESA and the EC.

Hence, I welcome the approach by ESA reflected in the announcement for space exploration and look forward to developing ideas on how Europe can become more responsive with a stronger role for the EO services industry to prepare for and to lead change. This will mean taking some decisions but together we can all benefit. The first decision should be to construct a means for structured dialogue between the stakeholders as a prelude to creating new partnerships in Europe.