

Takeaways

On 25 June 2025, ESPI and ISPRS co-hosted an evening debate on the sidelines of the Living Planet Symposium. Held at ESPI's premises in Vienna, the evening gathered a diverse audience from across the policy, diplomatic, scientific communities, and civil society and industry, within and beyond the space ecosystem, to discuss how commercial Earth Observation (EO) can better support the design and the impact of policies in Europe and beyond.

5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Broadening EO's role across emerging policy domains

While EO continues to play a central role in domains such as climate, agriculture, and disaster management, its value is rapidly expanding across other sectors such as energy, water management, security, diplomacy and finance. For instance, EO can contribute to a wide range of activities, including detecting fraud, tax evasion, and illegal drug trafficking. The neutral and verifiable nature of EO-derived information is a key added value.



Soon we will enter a period where it is hard to distinguish reality from fake. Satellites are an excellent neutral tool of what "is".

2 Moving from data demonstrations to turnkey solutions

Next to the volume of data produced, the utility of EO is enabled by its transformation into actionable insights, serving the achievement of policy objectives. Providing data alone is not sufficient – there is a need to move beyond technical showcases towards delivering practical, policy-relevant services (even in niches). Commercial actors are particularly well positioned.



Don't come with your data, come with services.



3 EO solutions should be co-created and tailored to local needs

EO should enable tailored services responding to policy issues at the national and local level, including development priorities, especially in regions such as Africa. Success depends on co-creation with local actors. Commercial entities can provide a variety of real-world use cases to support these stakeholders understand EO's practical value. Business models should include partnerships with local companies and institutions to better understand the needs, build on local knowledge and best practices, and ensure the sustainability of solutions and ecosystems.

We face common challenges, but we need to tackle specific problems with tailored solutions.



4 A key role for commercial EO in responding to specific policy objectives

It is not just space & science – EO also has an increasing economic value.

Commercial EO actors are well positioned to complement public programmes by providing tailored services that address specific gaps in policy action. Large-scale public programmes with open data policies such as Copernicus remain foundational, but deeper public-private collaboration is crucial for closing data gaps and translating raw EO data into value-added services. Moreover, extending the reach of EO solutions beyond the space community requires stronger engagement with non-space private and public actors, and international partners.

If tools are too complicated, governments will just not use them.



5 Earth Observation must be seen as an investment, not a cost

EO should be reframed as a strategic investment and policy enabler, considering its short- and long-term added value beyond the immediate costs related to the integration of EO-based solutions into policy action. Realising this potential depends on delivering EO solutions in formats that meet the needs of public administrations and non-space industrial sector, such as through simplified tools, integration with other data sources and applications, and demonstrated economic value, beyond scientific outcomes. Awareness-raising activities and investment in capacity-building for government officials and municipalities are (still) considered key in this context.