



# *The Committee on Space Research creates a new Panel on Social Sciences and Humanities*

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for immediate release

COSPAR, the Committee on Space Research, has created in June 2021 a **Panel on Social Sciences and Humanities (PSSH)**, aimed at giving itself a role commensurate with the current challenges of space activities, in terms of their interaction with society at large, and gaining increased visibility outside the regular space science community.

A second, equally important objective, is to offer space activities as one subject of interest and research to social science and humanities scholars and practitioners, with the aim of better understanding the perception of space activities by society, and of highlighting the corresponding stakes relating to these activities.

Indeed, space assets deliver daily services to the average citizen through various application domains: urban and land planning, risk management, disaster prevention and mitigation, security, etc. These are very practical areas that citizens connect to emotionally and there is therefore a necessity to ensure a strong contribution from COSPAR that can only be achieved through this dialogue with SSH colleagues and corresponding international unions. This dialogue should also extend to consideration of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and to the critical need of being able to explain to the public and to decision makers the relevance and importance of space research to society.

Particular consideration will be given to the challenges associated with issues related to climate change, i.e. the identification, assessment and prediction of the impact of anthropogenic activity and natural phenomena on the Earth system and the role of space observations and research, as highlighted by the [COSPAR Roadmap on Integrated Earth System Science](#).

One goal of the panel PSSH will be to use the unchallenged scientific competence of COSPAR to build awareness of the current and future challenges of space activities, for instance through the analysis of the impacts of space exploration and use of space assets in the development and running of society, in a context where there is growing interdependence of human societies on Earth.

**PRESS RELEASE**

The Chair of PSSH, Dr Isabelle Sourbès-Verger, is a geographer and Research Director at CNRS, specialized in the study of outer space activities and related national space policies. From 2010 to 2014, she was deputy director of History of Science and Technology Centre Alexandre Koyré.

Dr. Sourbès-Verger stated: *“I am very happy to see the creation of this panel within COSPAR and to be able to chair this important structure and related activities. We had an exciting inaugural meeting on 22 June 2021, and I have every hope that we will be able to contribute significantly to the scientific discussions on such key aspects for society.”*

Dr Jean-Claude Worms, Executive Director of COSPAR added that *“the PSSH expects to help open new areas of international cooperation involving a variety of scientists of diverse disciplines from natural and social sciences. For the SSH communities, PSSH will offer a larger audience and visibility for their work and provide opportunities for novel research in a highly dynamic field, and benefit from the recognition of their key role in promoting interdisciplinary research and collaboration.”*

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[Link to PSSH home page.](#)

**Note to Editors:**

COSPAR, the Committee on Space Research, was created in 1958, at the dawn of the space age, under the aegis of the International Council of Scientific Unions, now the [International Science Council \(ISC\)](#). COSPAR’s objectives are to promote on an international level scientific research in space, with emphasis on the exchange of results, information and opinions, and to provide a forum, open to all scientists, for the discussion of problems that may affect scientific space research.

In its first years of existence as an entity that ignores political considerations and views all questions solely from the scientific standpoint, COSPAR played an important role as an open bridge between East and West for cooperation in space. When this role became less prominent with the end of the Cold War, COSPAR focused its objectives on the progress of all kinds of research carried out with the use of space means. COSPAR has played a very central role in the development of new space disciplines such as life sciences or fundamental physics in space, by facilitating the interaction between scientists in emerging space fields and senior space researchers.

# PRESS RELEASE

COSPAR strives to promote the use of space science for the benefit of mankind and for its adoption by developing countries and new space-faring nations, in particular through a series of Capacity Building Workshops which teach very practical skills enabling researchers to participate in international space research programs.

COSPAR advises, as required, the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations on space research matters or on the assessment of scientific issues in which space can play a role, for example the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), in which COSPAR is a Participating Organization.

Furthermore, COSPAR is the key entity world-wide in terms of developing, maintaining and promulgating clearly delineated policies and requirements as to the standards that must be achieved to protect against the harmful effects of biological interchange in the conduct of solar system exploration and use. Such protection against potential contamination, called “Planetary Protection”, encompasses (1) possible effects of contamination of planets other than the Earth, and of planetary satellites within the solar system by terrestrial organisms; and (2) potential contamination of the Earth by materials returned from outer space carrying potential extraterrestrial organisms.

COSPAR and its Panel on Planetary Protection informs the international community and authorities responsible for compliance with the UN Outer Space Treaty of 1967, e.g. the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) of the United Nations, as well as various other bilateral and multilateral organizations, of policy developments on Planetary Protection.