



Polycentric Multilateralism:

Reimagining the Roles of International Institutions in Space Governance and Beyond

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Using the case study of space governance, this project envisions a polycentric approach to the governance of critical transnational challenges. Reimagining the roles of long-standing multilateral international institutions that suffer from decades-long gridlock, this study explores the capacity of polycentricity to provide efficient responses to the governance of the global commons and global affairs more generally. Elinor Ostrom's Nobel-winning study (*Economic Sciences*, 2009) found strong empirical proof, in lab and in the field, across countries and sectors, favoring polycentric governance of *local* commons. However, it has not been empirically tested for *global* commons and the potential to apply Ostrom's theory to global affairs remains untapped, leaving, as Keohane observed, "unexploited opportunities" for investigators seeking to understand issues in global affairs. The hypothesis is that polycentric governance would be a practical solution to the collective action problem of governing outer space and space activities.



The project, funded by the **Carnegie** Corporation of New York, combines the theoretical strength of the **Ostrom Workshop** at Indiana University, Bloomington, where the research is conducted, with the unique massive space governance dataset built at Laval University. The dataset maps space actors and the institutional arrangements connecting them, with data on more than 1,500 actors and 1,400 arrangements, including hundreds of full text agreements. The project researchers analyze the **Laval dataset** using Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development framework (IAD) and dedicated software (NVivo and R) in order to prove or refute the hypothesis.

This project seeks to reimagine the role of existing international institutions as less of monocentric decision-making centers and more as connecting hubs that support and coordinate emerging polycentric networks. **We call it 'polycentric multilateralism'**. This approach would reinvigorate the existing institutional system to better respond to contemporary and future challenges (*e.g.*, space debris, space security, space resource exploitation). A polycentric structure would be better adapted to the reality of global politics, including of power shifts and power diffusion.