2026 JOINT INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP
UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA – NOVA UNIVERSITY OF LISBON

CALL FOR PAPERS

Infrastructuring the Global Commons: High Seas, Antarctica, Outer Space, and Beyond

The notion of the "global commons" has long designated spaces that exceed the territorial sovereignty of any single state and whose use, regulation, and protection raise questions of collective concern: the high seas, Antarctica, outer space, the deep seabed, the atmosphere, and, more recently, the electromagnetic spectrum, the dark and quiet sky, and other planetary environments whose degradation cannot be contained within national borders.

These spaces are increasingly traversed, measured, secured, exploited, and reconfigured by expanding infrastructural systems. Submarine fibre-optic cables, satellite constellations, polar logistics, deep-sea sensing systems, launch sites, data centres, remote observatories, mining areas, bioprospecting sites and environmental monitoring platforms are transforming the material and legal conditions through which global commons are known, exploited and governed. These infrastructures enable connectivity, scientific cooperation, environmental protection, and forms of international coordination. At the same time, they produce new asymmetries of access, extractive frontiers, geopolitical tensions, and uneven geographies marked by dependency.

The infrastructuring of the global commons is inseparable from the rise of corporate networks that reorganise access to shared environments through proprietary systems, technical standards, and vertically integrated infrastructures: a layered assemblage of cloud platforms, data centres, submarine cables, satellite systems, sensing devices, AI models, logistical networks, and energy infrastructures through which planetary spaces are increasingly connected and made operational.

This workshop asks how global commons have been - and are being - infrastructured. How have infrastructures transformed spaces formally imagined as open, shared, or beyond appropriation into operational environments of communication, extraction, surveillance, conservation, experimentation, and accumulation? How do legal regimes such as the BBNJ Agreement, the Antarctic Treaty System, the Outer Space Treaty, spectrum governance, and emerging debates around orbital congestion or dark and quiet skies mediate these transformations? And how are older histories of empire, logistics, science, and capitalist expansion being recomposed through contemporary planetary infrastructures?

The workshop aims to foster an interdisciplinary conversation on the infrastructures through which global commons have been materially produced, politically contested, and historically transformed. We welcome papers from history, geography, political ecology, science and technology studies, international law, critical security studies, environmental humanities, media studies, anthropology, sociology, and related fields. Contributions may address, among other topics:

- colonial and postcolonial histories of 'global commons' and 'global infrastructures';
- submarine cables, seabed infrastructures, high-seas governance, and marine protected areas;
- satellite constellations, orbital debris, spectrum politics, and the protection of the dark and quiet sky;
- Antarctic and polar infrastructures, logistics, science, tourism, and extractive imaginaries;
- data centres, cloud platforms, AI infrastructures, and the material geographies of planetary computation;
- environmental monitoring, remote sensing, and the production of governable planetary spaces;
- infrastructural labour, maintenance, repair, vulnerability, and breakdown;
- counter-mapping, commoning, and resistance to the really-existing politics of global infrastructure

Interested scholars are invited to send an abstract of 300–500 words and a short bio to Amedeo Policante [policante@fcsh.unl.pt] and Mattia Frapporti [mattia.frapporti2@unibo.it] by **30 November 2026**.

The workshop will take place in Lisbon on the **27th of January 2027** as part of the **Bologna–Lisbon 2026 Joint International Workshop**.

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