

[Keynote lecture] Why international law is failing as a discipline: Geopolitics, legality and the crisis of cartographic vision

For generations, disciplinary international law learned to see the world through maps. Bordered polygons, planar grids, and territorial containers promised order, stability, and governable space. This cartographic imagination did more than represent the Earth; it prescribed how authority, jurisdiction, and legality would be organised and recognised. Today, that visual order is under strain. Satellites, platforms, undersea cables, data infrastructures, logistics corridors, sanctions systems, and migratory flows project power through pixels rather than polygons. The world international law continues to see collides with the world it now governs.

In this keynote, Prof Rajkovic (Tilburg University) will trace how this visual inheritance emerged – from the international world map and the territorial trap of twentieth-century geopolitics to the contemporary crisis of *lex cartographica* – and why it increasingly misaligns with the spatial organisation of authority. Drawing on critical geography, it shows how disciplinary innovation often circles back toward statist cartography through a logic of systems maintenance, translating new legal phenomena into familiar territorial grammars rather than confronting deeper spatial transformation.

Crucially, Prof Rajkovic will argue that disciplinary international law's present difficulty is not decline but perceptual lag: a failure to recalibrate how legality is visualised, bounded, and made intelligible as governance migrates into infrastructures, technical systems, and mobile "things" that now function as boundaries. It concludes by calling for renewed visual literacy, infrastructural attention, and interdisciplinary experimentation to restore analytical traction and political relevance in a reconfigured geopolitical world.

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