

Capturing the Space Economy

Private and National Appropriation of the Global Commons

Kasey Brown

Introduction

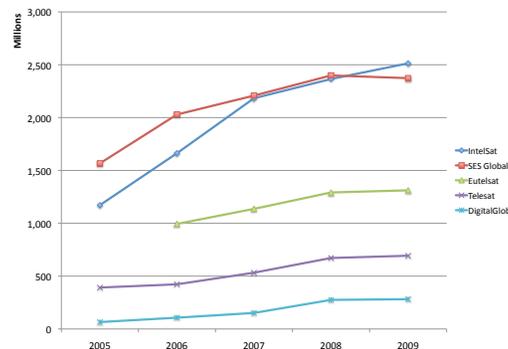
By international law, space is a global commons that can be controlled by no single nation. However, as revenues in the space economy continue to grow, states may have a vested interest in controlling space. This is a relatively new phenomenon that has emerged with technology growth in the past two decades. Regulation that originally began as a way to prevent overuse of a global commons, has now become a way to appropriate financially profitable orbits within space. There is a unique tension that has developed resultant of appropriating something still considered a global commons.

Research

The first goal of this research is to understand the space economy structure that currently exists. The top four fixed satellite services companies' financial documents have been examined in order to understand the revenues streaming from telecommunications satellites. Secondly, commercial imaging is a recently emerging part of the satellite economy. The SEC filings of DigitalGlobe, a leading company in this sector, were reviewed, and an interview was conducted with a company representative to establish a base of the activity taking place from imaging satellites. Lastly, the International Telecommunications Union's (ITU) regulations in place for appropriating satellite orbits and frequencies were studied. These regulations set a baseline for how countries are expected to act within the satellite economy.

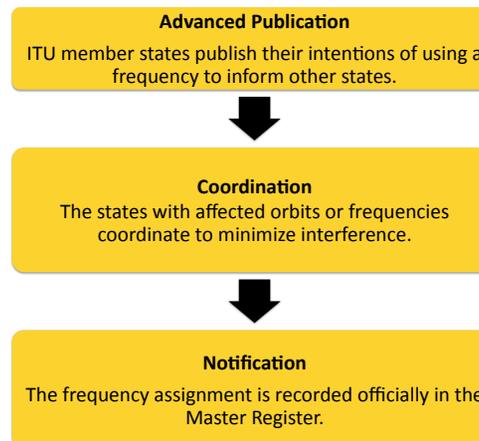
Growth in the Space Economy

Revenues from 2005-2009



ITU Frequency Allocation Process

Necessary Measures to Gain an Internationally Recognized Frequency



Findings

The four telecommunications satellite companies have continued growth in revenue over the past decade. Each has launched new satellites and all have undergone major transformations, such as being purchased, making acquisitions, or privatization. Furthermore, the commercial imaging business in the space economy is still in its infancy, but being fostered by its benefits to governments and corporations. Even as the private sector of the space economy continues to grow, the review of the ITU Radio Regulations has shown that international regulations still focus on states as the main actors in space. This is illustrative of the tension between the origins of the regulations as means to prevent destruction of space as a global commons and the new reality that corporations now view these orbits as revenue generating hotspots.

References

Radio Regulations, Geneva, Switzerland: International Telecommunications Union, 2008.

All SEC filings were found through EDGAR on sec.gov.

Other financial results found at company websites:
eutelsat.com ses.com
intelsat.com telesat.com
digitalglobe.com

Email: brow2089@umn.edu

Department of Political Science
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Mentor: Raymond Duvall

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