

Joint Doctoral Retreat “Area Studies Revisited – and Applied”



”*What should be avoided is unreflective trust in ready-made conceptual supports, naive forays into well-trodden theoretical paths, risk-free acceptance of narrow thought spaces or even subservience to one or more “schools of thoughts” that strictly guide the argumentation. One should not allow oneself to be blinded by concepts and theories, no matter how attractive and elegant they may seem. They must always be brushed against their grain and, above all, they must be always proved through their application.*” Eva Kreisky

***DP ESOE, Centre for Southeast European Studies at the Karl-Franzens-University Graz
Leibniz ScienceCampus "Europe and America in the Modern World", University Regensburg and IOS
Doctoral Academy Karl-Franzens-University Graz
CAS SEE, University Rijeka***

Joint Doctoral Retreat "Area Studies Revisited – and Applied"

09.-13. February 2025

Moise Palace, Zagrad 6, Cres, Croatia

Purpose

The joint doctoral retreat serves a debate about fundamental concepts and methodologies of Area Studies, a critical reflection on recent trends in this field, and a discussion of their applicability to the individual doctoral projects of the participants. The retreat will be organized by the Centre for Southeast European Studies in Graz and the Regensburg based Leibniz ScienceCampus "Europe and America in the Modern World."

Potentials and Pitfalls of Area Studies

"How we run depends on what shoes we have to run in." Thus social anthropologist Ana Lowenhaupt Tsing summarized the importance of place and material possibilities in a globalized world. The world has increasingly become an interconnected one, which is highlighted by the popularity of concepts such as transnationalism or globalization. At the same time, it remains a highly divergent and unequal place. We therefore need to look not only what is connecting, but also what is connected. Even thoroughly globalized places have their own histories and are embedded into specific institutional networks and cultural value-systems.

Area Studies have therefore an important role to play in making sense of a changing, but entangled world. They exist between global studies and local studies, and can act as a translator between these two scales. Area Studies are supposed to produce 'thick' knowledge rooted in empirical research in the areas of interest. Since Area Studies are usually defined by a common geographic (regional) denominator, they include different disciplines. Language proficiency, interdisciplinarity, and a dialogue with locally produced research are often cited as the particular epistemic advantages of Area Studies. Area Studies are sensitive to the importance of space (place), while they are also well placed to evaluate the concrete impact of entanglements and interactions.

Yet, to fulfil their potential, Area Studies must also reflect on drawbacks and pitfalls, some of them rooted in the genealogy of this academic pursuit, which was established in the context of imperialism. How, for example, to deal with the tension between the idea of area and the recognition of its heterogeneity? If areas cannot be clearly defined, what is the subject of Area Studies? What about the problem of essentializing certain areas and thus limiting the scope of our curiosity – such as masterfully described by Maria Todorova for the Balkans? How can claims of specificity and uniqueness of a certain area be balanced with a recognition of differences within this claimed area, and similarities with other areas? This also raises the question of the relationship between Area Studies and disciplinary knowledge – a particular point of tension in social sciences (such as economics or political science) which operate with universalistic assumptions. How to deal with inequalities in knowledge hierarchies, as Area Studies usually are a "Western" pursuit? Area Studies that limit their own knowledge horizon would be just another word for not knowing what is happening in other societies and regions of the world.

In our retreat we will discuss these questions, based on joint reading of classic and recent Area Studies contributions. We will address especially the following five larger questions:

1. What are the ideological legacies of Area Studies and their analytical limitations?
2. How can we study 'regions' without presupposing their existence and salience; how to avoid methodological regionalism?
3. How does Area Studies knowledge relate to locally produced knowledge on the one hand, and to global studies on the other?
4. What is the contribution of Area Studies to 'general disciplines'; can they provide more nuance to excessive generalizations and question the applicability of universal models?
5. What is the relationship between the trans-local and the local, between entanglement and emplacement, between transregional connections and the gravity of place?

We will discuss these issues by looking into the traditions and methodologies of different Area Studies traditions and by following ongoing debates on "Comparative / Transregional / New, etc., Area Studies". The discussion is not limited to the abstract: participants will situate their own research in these debates. Our hope is that an engagement with Area Studies debate will be fruitful for each doctoral project present. Which is also why we invite comparative perspectives and participants working on different areas of the world. Such an exercise will also help the Southeast Europeanists present to contextualize their work in a broader analytical framework.

Retreat Team Members

DP ESOE Speaker:	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Florian Bieber
DP ESOE Co-Speaker:	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Heike Karge
DP ESOE Academic Coordinator:	Dr. Hrvoje Paić

Director, Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies and Keynote:

	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ulf Brunnbauer
University of Regensburg:	Dr. Andrea Kaltenbrunner
University of Regensburg:	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Rainer Liedtke

Guest Lecturer via zoom, KFU Graz:	Dr. Gerald Lind
Guest Lecturer via zoom, KFU Graz:	Dr. Mario Müller

PhD Researchers:	Xiong Renije, Regensburg; Pavel Romanov, Regensburg; Sara Žerić Đulović, Regensburg; Eriona Ajvazi, Graz; Dario Brentin, Graz; Ivana Spirovska, Graz; Alejandro Estezo Perez, Graz; Fjolla Ceku Sylleymani, Graz; Mirela Brajdić, Graz; Brigita Božić, Graz; Benedetta Merlino, Graz.
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Head of Administrative Coordination:	Mag.a Tanja Bilaver, Tanja.Bilaver@uni-graz.at
Administration University Regensburg:	Dr. Paul Vickers, Paul.Vickers@ur.de
Head of Administration Palace Moise:	Dr. Andrea Malovoz, +385 95 529 8717

TIMETABLE

DAY I: 09.02. ARRIVAL

Late Afternoon and Evening: Individual Arrival / Check-in / Informal Gathering in Palace Moise, Cres

20:00 – 21:00

Dinner – Restaurant in Cres

DAY II: 10.02.: KEYNOTE AND ARTICLE DISCUSSIONS

8:00 – 9:00

Breakfast – Palace Moise

9:30 – 10:45

Introduction: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Florian Bieber and Dr. Hrvoje Paić

Keynote and Discussion: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ulf Brunnbauer: Area Studies Revisited – and Applied

10:45 – 11:00

Coffee Break

11:00 – 11:40

Heike Karge: Busse et al.: *“Contextualizing the Contextualizers: How the Area Studies Controversy is Different in Different Places”*

11:40 – 12:20

Hrvoje Paić: Koch: *„Is a “critical” area studies possible?”*

12:20 – 13:00

Andrea Kaltenbrunner: Bracewell: *„Eastern Europe and Area Studies“*

13:00 – 14:00

Lunch Break – Restaurant in Cres

14:00 – 14:40

Mirela Brajdić: Chansa-Ngavej and Lee: *„Does Area Studies Need Theory? Revisiting the Debate on the Future of Area Studies“*

14:40 – 15:20

Florian Bieber: Derichs: *„Area Studies and Disciplines“*

15:20 – 16:00

Insights in Academia I: Gerald Lind (zoom lecture): Rules and Secrets of Academia

16:00 – 16:15 +

Coffee and Free Time Onwards – Palace Moise

20:00 – 21:00

Dinner – Restaurant in Cres

DAY III: 11.02.: ARTICLE DISCUSSIONS

8:00 – 9:00

Breakfast – Palace Moise

9:30 – 10:10

Fjolla Ceku: Alejandro: „Do international relations scholars not care about Central and Eastern Europe or do they just take the region for granted?“

10:10 – 10:50

Benedetta Merlino: Rehbein: „New Area Studies, Scientific Communities and Knowledge Production“

10:50 – 11:15

Coffee Break

11:15 – 11:55

Alejandro Esteso Perez: Trubina et al.: „A part of the world or apart from the world? The postsocialist Global East in the geopolitics of knowledge

11:55 – 12:35

Dario Brentin & Sara Žerić Đulović: Horvat and Ranković: „Galeb i golub. Heritage Scholars, Power and Knowledge Production in (Post-)Yugoslav Studies“

12:35 – 13:05

Brigita Božić: Hoffmann: „Latin America and Beyond: The Case for Comparative Area Studies“

13:05 – 14:05

Lunch Break – Restaurant in Cres

14:05 – 14:45

Renjie Xiong: Acharya: „International Relations and Area Studies: Towards a New Synthesis?“

14:45 – 15:25

Ivana Spirovska: Bates: „Area Studies and the Discipline“

15:25 – 16:05

Pavel Romanov: Danopoulos: The Cultural Roots of Corruption in Greece

16:05 – 16:35 +

Coffee and Free Time Onwards

20:00 – 21:00

Dinner – Restaurant in Cres

DAY IV: 12.02.: PHD PROGRESS REPORTS

8:00 – 9:00

Breakfast – Palace Moise

9:30 – 10:20

Insights in Academia II: Mario Müller (zoom lecture): AI in Academia

10:20 – 11:50

Dario Brentin: *Sport and Narratives of National Identity in post-Yugoslav Croatia*

Ivana Spirovskaja: *Entrapped in a Legal Limbo: Examining the Citizenship-Belonging Nexus in the Case of Stateless Members of the Roma in North Macedonia*

Benedetta Merlino: *War Memorialization and State Capture in Bosnia and Herzegovina*

11:50 – 13:20

Pavel Romanov: *Corruption as incompleteness. The Russian Orthodox Church's views on corruption 1856-1917*

Alejandro Estezo Perez: *Varieties of sub-national illiberalism in Kosovo and North Macedonia*

Mirela Brajdić: *Women's Movements and Norm Contestation in Croatia and Serbia*

13:20 – 14:20

Lunch Break – Restaurant in Cres

14:20 – 15:50

Xiong Renije: *China and Yugoslavia and African Decolonisation: Case Study of the Congo Crisis*

Eriona Ajvazi: *The use of the European Union mediation language in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue*

Brigita Božić: *Hybrid Regimes and the Minorities: Comparative Analysis of Hungary and Serbia*

15:50 – 16:00

Coffee Break

16:00 – 17:00

Fjolla Ceku Sylleymani: *Kosovo and the EU: the Relational Nexus, Entanglement and Communicative Discourse Between an Emerging State and a State-building Union*

Sara Žerić Đulović: *Gastarbeiters as agents of development in Socialist Yugoslavia*

17:00 – 17:30

Insights in (Non-)Academia III: Dario Brentin: The freedom of the margins? Personal experiences from academia's third(ly) spaces

17:30 – 18:00

Rainer Liedtke: *Concluding Sketches: Area Studies and Transnationalism*

20:00 – 21:00

Dinner – Restaurant in Cres

DAY V: 13:02. DEPARTURE

Morning: Individual Departure from Palace Moise, Cres and Hotel

GUIDELINES FOR ARTICLE PRESENTATIONS: READING AND ANALYZING TEXT IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

1. Introducing Context I: Information on Author

1. What do you know about the author (his/her biographic background)?
2. What do you know about professional occupation and career of the author including his/her research interests?
3. What can you say about political activities, ideological and academic orientation („school of thought“ / „Denkschule“) of the author? Who are his/her closest colleagues and what can you say about their „school of thought“ and professional relations (mutual academic/ideological influence) with author? How would you describe related „school of thought“? Can you locate the author in one or more traditions (for example Foucauldian, Adornian, Weberian et cetera), and if yes how?
4. The author's text can be seen as materialization of his/her biographical/professional/ideological/political/academic backgrounds. Identify parts of the text that are according to your opinion indicating some of the mentioned backgrounds.
5. What kinds of sources have been used by author? Can you categorize and describe them?

2. Introducing Context II: Social Context, State-of-the-art and General Text Characteristics

1. Year of publication – identify/describe relevant social, academic (state-of-the-art) and political context of the text (historical events and processes that are possibly relevant for the author and his thematic focusing, and in doing so, for the understanding of the text). To what extent is relevant social and political context reflected in text? Explain your position.
2. Determine degree of difficulty of the text (was the text and its central theses understandable for you)? What was understandable and which part of the text were not understandable for you? What was assumed by author as a kind of „common sense“?
3. Determine target audience / addressees of the text. Explain your related claims.
4. What were the central aims of the text – what did author tried to achieve with his/her text?
5. Have author managed to develop in-depth and enough encompassing analysis? Explain your related claims.

3. Content Reconstruction

1. What kind of text is related text? What are the characteristics of this sort of text? What is the text main subject? Identify central analysis concepts.
2. Identify central analysis questions as well as central hypothesis/argument that are structuring/focusing the analysis.
3. Describe text analysis structure - describe author's analytical methodology.
4. Sketch central contents and structure in form of **short chart or diagram**.
5. Describe the results of analysis. What statements and conclusions do you find particularly interesting, and why?

4. Critical Content Reflections

1. What have you learned from the text? Describe shortly new knowledge, insights and aspects of the subject – “added value” for you? How relevant are these insights for your research project, and if yes how?
2. Did this text confronted with you with some knowledge gaps of yours? Describe them. Have you developed new interest for the text subject? If yes, in what direction, if not, why?
3. What segments of the text – overall structure, hypothesis, concepts, methodology, soundness of execution / argumentation chains, results of analysis – would you criticize and how, e.g. what are the main weaknesses of the text? What segments of the text do you find particularly convincing and why?
4. What questions were left unanswered? Do you find the text still up-to-date and why?