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Crossroads studies: from spatial containers to interactions in differentiated spatialities: 'Area Studies'-discussion paper of the Research Network Crossroads

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Arbeitspapier / working paper

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Mielke, K., & Hornidge, A.-K. (2014). *Crossroads studies: from spatial containers to interactions in differentiated spatialities: 'Area Studies'-discussion paper of the Research Network Crossroads.* (Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series, 15). Bonn: Universität Bonn, Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-397519

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CROSSROADS ASIA

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Crossroads Studies: From Spatial Containers to Interactions in Differentiated Spatialities

'Area Studies'-Discussion paper of the Research Network Crossroads Asia

Authored by Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge

based on a discussion process with Henryk Alff, Andreas Benz, Ayfer Durdu, Anna Grieser, Joe Hill, Aksana Ismailbekova, Jana Jüssen, Antía Mato Bouzas, Shahnaz Nadjmabadi, Nelli Nokkala, Lutz Rzehak, Conrad Schetter, Elena Smolarz, Martin Sökefeld, Christoph Wenzel & Andreas Wilde (in alphabetical order)

ISSN 2192-6034

Bonn, January 2014
[edited May 14, 2014]

Crossroads Asia Working Papers

Competence Network Crossroads Asia: Conflict – Migration – Development

Editors: Ingeborg Baldauf, Stephan Conermann, Anna-Katharina Hornidge, Hermann Kreutzmann, Shahnaz Nadjmabadi, Dietrich Reetz, Conrad Schetter and Martin Sökefeld.

How to cite this paper: Mielke, Katja and Hornidge, Anna-Katharina (2014): Crossroads Studies: From Spatial Containers to Interactions in Differentiated Spatialities. In: Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series, No. 15.

Partners of the Network:

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Universität Tübingen
Institut für Ethnologie

Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO)

Funded by:

Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung

Imprint

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Date: December 18, 2013; edited May 14, 2014

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1. Introduction

The research network Crossroads Asia: Conflict, Migration, Development, funded by the BMBF Area Studies Initiative, started off in March 2011 on a four-year journey with the aim of questioning the validity of the conventional 'world regions' of Central and South Asia as defining bases for Area Studies (AS) as conceptualised, organised and taught at German universities. The increasing mobility of people, goods and ideas along Asia's crossroads – the network's underlying assumption – no longer justifies the division of the world into territorially fixed 'areas' defined by certain character traits found on the 'inside'; instead, it demands 'area' concepts that take into account these dynamisms. In order to achieve this objective, and with the broader aim of rethinking conventional AS approaches, the network chose a novel approach, with Norbert Elias's figurations at its conceptual centre, bringing together AS expertise (Iranian Studies, Central Asian Studies, East European Studies, Southeast Asian Studies and Turkology) with disciplinary and interdisciplinary discussions from the social sciences and humanities (geography, history, political science, sociology, linguistics and social anthropology).[1]

This paper, written a little less than three years after entering into the process, aims at facilitating discussion in the network and should be read as a 'thought piece' based on the joint reflections of members of the Crossroads Asia network regarding different strands of the literature related to AS, academia and research in times of dialectics between ongoing globalisation and further differentiations. As such, we consider the paper first of all as a work in progress, a 'living document', capturing our ongoing discussions, allowing us to order our thoughts and encouraging us to think further. It is meant to position the Crossroads Asia network's approach in the wider AS debate, with the hope of contributing to the debate's revival and providing some further food for thought on the basis of our own reflections. The paper does not intend to offer a final Crossroads Studies concept, but instead it acts as a tool for guiding our discussions towards the formulation of this concept. The paper therefore, second, serves as a 'boundary object' (Mollinga 2008, 2010) by creating a tangible basis for – and thus nurturing an active exchange of thought on – 'Crossroads Studies' across different 'systematic' disciplines and AS inside and outside the network, with colleagues from other AS networks and centres funded by BMBF in the countries in which we work as well as other world regions contributing to the debate. This is often summarised under the notion of the 'Post Area Studies' debate. Finally, this living document and boundary object not only nurtures the debate, but also documents the process. The third purpose of the paper is therefore to authenticate and record the process, hopefully not only resulting in a final 'Crossroads Studies' concept in the future, but also allowing for a reflection on the research, the discussion and thus the networking process itself.

A first draft of this paper was produced for an internal workshop on July 20, 2013, organised in order to reflect on the research network's initial objectives, particularly its proclaimed attempt to rethink conventional AS approaches (see Ch. 3 below, as well as the Crossroads Asia/BMBF application 2010). By that time, each network member had been exposed to the challenge of integrating a critical perspective on conventional AS approaches into the research proposal of his/her individual work package. The larger network institutes organised Crossroads lectures with a focus on questions of space, networks, mobility, AS and figurations. The first conferences, working group meetings and

[1] Overall, the network consists of 25 core members, many of whom have worked at the intersection of different disciplines in interdisciplinary research projects, study programmes and institutions as well as in AS for many years. Furthermore, the network combines PhD researchers and post-doc researchers, professors, lecturers and fellows with diverse backgrounds from research institutions in the geographical core area covered by the research paradigm Crossroads Asia.

workshops touched upon the AS debate and related topics time and again . The produced paper draft summarised some of the preliminary insights, in order to stimulate and structure the discussion. Besides discussions during the workshop, further comments and the inputs of network members followed in the months thereafter. On December 11, 2013, the paper was discussed with Steffi Marung, a member of the BMBF-funded Area Studies centre 'Cultural Encounter and Political Orders in a Global Age' as part of a Crossroads Asia lecture in Bonn. On December 13, 2013, the now reworked document formed the basis of a discussion in a workshop co-organised by Crossroads Asia and the Latin America Network 'Ethnicity, Citizenship and Belonging', also funded by BMBF in the same funding programme. In the version of the 'living document' presented herein, the first (though not all) details of these discussions, and all comments received on the subject, have been incorporated accordingly.

To summarise, our main aim is to sketch out ongoing debates on rethinking AS, and then to discussion them in line with Crossroads Asia's ongoing research work. It is too early for us to extract systematically the empirical findings of our different work packages, or to formulate and elaborate explicitly our 'Post Area Studies' approach based on our empirical research. Nevertheless, what we can do confidently at this moment in time is to position our research in ongoing 'Post Area Studies' debates and to identify several thematic cores which our data indicate play a crucial role in the everyday lives of people living between Eastern Iran and Northern India, as well as the Aral Sea and Western China, in questioning and negotiating the conventional regions of 'Central' and 'South Asia'. Our research indicates strongly that (a) various forms of mobility and mobilisation processes and (b) borders and boundaries, processes of boundary-production, -weakening and -crossing form the core in our work following local actors' definitions/usage/construction of space (taking emic spaces of interaction *[Handlungsräume]* as spaces/areas where empirical research is based *[Untersuchungsräume]*). Different mobilities and types of borders and boundaries are negotiated, come into being and take shape as a consequence of human interaction. Crossroads Studies therefore place this interrelation between the dynamic (mobilities and mobilisation processes), the static (borders, boundaries, their establishment, negotiation and dissembling) and the many differentiations in between proving this constructed dichotomy wrong, studied through the lens of human (individual and collective) interaction, at the research paradigm's core. With regard to ongoing debates on rethinking AS, this means that we locate ourselves, Crossroads Studies, in the centre of what Knorr-Cetina (1999: 12) calls "the disunity of science" and "the diversity of the manufacturing systems from which truth effects arise". The term 'Crossroads Studies', and the concept behind it, put forth and reflected on in this working paper, therefore refer not only to the study of different types of mobility, flows and dynamisms along some of Asia's crossroads, but also to the study of these types of mobility and border/boundary negotiations through interactions. Thus, the communicative construction of space at the crossroads of several AS and 'systematic' disciplines – a result of the conscious linking of concepts and methods from AS and 'systematic' disciplines – constitutes a key element of 'Crossroads Studies'. Precisely which concepts and methods are selected and linked (i.e. Elias's figurational sociology, Berger/Luckmann's and Knoblauch's communicative constructivism, Jessop and Leitner's discussions on the multidimensionality of space, etc.) is decided based on the empirical data collected. 'Crossroads Studies' thus remain embedded in the everyday realities of people, their actions and interactions while studying these everyday experiences with the help of methodological and conceptual approaches from the so-called 'systematic' disciplines.

In order to achieve this goal, the current paper will firstly (Ch. 2) briefly review contested views on the substance of conventional AS and its critiques, which formed the underlying rationale for the BMBF to launch its AS initiative in 2008. In a second step (Ch. 3) the Crossroads approach will be summarised, to reflect on our identity as members of the Crossroads Asia network, our treatment of the key concepts and how the network has fared so far in locating itself in the ongoing debate(s) (Ch. 4). A thought experiment on applied research in and about a 'nation-state container' (Ch. 5) will help to illustrate some of the previous points made in Chapters 2-4, thereby highlighting the often neglected significance of cultural as well as linguistic translation(s). Furthermore, it will help in revealing the tension which is commonly perceived between carrying out fundamental research, on the one hand, and applied research, on the other. As part of the paper's preliminary conclusions, Chapter 6 presents a summary of the Crossroads Asia research network's work in progress regarding 'rethinking AS'.

We invite all readers – disciplinarians, Areanists[2] and other interested parties – to comment on this paper. Members of other BMBF-funded AS competence networks, as well as all international colleagues working on the topic, are encouraged to join the discussion and share their own views on the topics touched upon in this text. As the outline shows, we have taken account of a few strands of the debate in the Southeast Asian Studies, East European and African Studies community and integrated selective features that seem relevant for our discussion. As briefly indicated above, we actively seek an exchange with fellow colleagues who are also rethinking AS, through our Crossroads Asia lecture series, workshops and fellowship programme. Furthermore, this paper will serve as a basis for the planning of the final Crossroads Asia conference on November 27/28, 2014, at the Center for Development Research, University of Bonn, entitled 'Crossroads Studies', and the planning of a 'post-area studies' panel at the 4th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network in Hong Kong, December 2014.

2. Review

Recently, AS has become characterised as a 'set of knowledge orders and related practices'.[3] This neutral view is in stark contrast with agenda-centric conventional viewpoints on the meaning, usefulness, means and ends of AS, which evolved in the guise of disciplines (with the noun 'studies' after the 'area' determiner) after World War II. Without applying a strict historical approach to reviewing AS and the debates surrounding the topic, the next sections will highlight selective features found in a large body of literature that has been produced on the substance and critique of AS.[4]

[2] The main characters in this paper are 'Areanists' and 'disciplinarians'. The first term was adopted by Houben, who mentioned it during the Crossroads Lecture on 12 June 2013 in Bonn; the second term is taken from Sayer (1999).

[3] Ulf Engel, Center for Area Studies, Leipzig, giving a Crossroads Lecture at ZEF, titled "Critical Junctures of Globalization and Area Studies", 6 February 2013.

[4] Given that the general background to the evolution and characteristics of AS is widely known, it shall be sufficient at this point to refer to further readings on the subject: for pre-Cold War concepts of area-focused studies (culture areas) see Kroeber (1947), and for aspects of conventional AS see an overview in the reference list.

2.1 The substance of conventional Area Studies

With common roots in colonial projects and the related quest to generate information and knowledge about 'the other' (catchword 'orientalism'), in order to better exploit, understand and master it, while at the same time reaffirming the self's distinction from the other, AS has taken different paths in academia in the US and Europe. While in Germany and many European countries AS has been built on a strong tradition of historical Oriental Studies and linguistics, the situation and institutionalisation of AS in the US was characterised by the latter's status as one of the two major Cold War powers in the bipolar world order until 1990. Subsequently, the rationale behind funding AS in the US was informed by the perceived need to 'understand the enemy', not least literally through adequate language training (Burgess 2004: 125). Post-World War II AS always had two fixed spatial anchor points, namely its place of origin (where it was directed and implemented in established centres, written about in respective journals and enriched by study-organisations, boards, specialised conferences, etc.) and its focus region (a specific political system: Sovietology, a region; South Asia, a continent; Africa, a geopolitically defined space following colonial tradition; the Middle East). In this convention, AS was meant to help collect information and data, in order to build encyclopaedic-style knowledge[5] about these spatially fixed focus entities. Conceptually informed by modernisation theory, AS was thought to facilitate the implementation of US development policy (Boatca 2012). Institutional backing (the build-up of study programmes around language and the transmission of cultural competences in specially designed curricula) and organisational support (the establishment of departments, boards, chairs and journals) remained basically unabated until the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As a result, van Schendel (2002) speaks of the evolution of certain area lineages – the 'imagined area communities' of researchers who interact and relate to each other in a self-referential style without looking beyond their area boundaries. The fact that Sovietologists had not anticipated the demise of the Eastern bloc focused the spotlight not only on the usefulness of the guild and AS in line with its ways of generating knowledge in general, but also subsequently its funding structure: "Area Studies are the largest institutional epistemology through which the academy in the US has apprehended much of the world in the last fifty years"(Appadurai 2000: 3), thereby enabling the enforcement of particular "geographies of power" (van Schendel 2002) in line with the geopolitically informed logic of the Cold War.

In several European countries, AS can be traced back to an early interest in studying the societies of European colonies – primitive tribes and 'the uncivilised' – organised through the academic disciplines of ethnology and anthropology (Houben/Rehbein 2010). This interest in the societies of European colonies led to the founding of disciplines such as Indology and Sinology, which at the time still focused on grand (former) civilisations. After World War II, the now independent former colonies, most of which were part of the 'Third World', either became part of the Soviet bloc or were developed along the societal model of Western capitalism. In Germany, despite the fact that all colonial ambitions and commercial interests as the basis for the predecessors of what was later called 'AS' were put to an end with World War I, scientific interest in regions of former world empires, such as India and China, remained intact (Basedau/Köllner 2007). In comparison to US-American counterparts, nevertheless, the strong historical, textual and thus philological focus of former Oriental Studies and an interest in the culture, literature, arts and (ancient) languages of the

[5] A focus which, at the time (and spurred further by the so-called 'Sputnik-Shock' in 1957), was core to overall information politics in the US, Japan and most European countries.

studied societies continued to determine the discipline's development. After the division of Germany into East and West, AS in Eastern Germany developed with a much less developmentalist orientation than in the US, and instead yielded a stronger interdisciplinary social scientific orientation. Boatca (2012: 24), referencing Krauth and Wolz (1998), argues that merely the AS China (Chinawissenschaften) in Eastern Germany can be viewed retrospectively "as contract research and directly depending on the respective political relations between GDR and China", while African Studies, as well as Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies, especially before 1980, produced internationally recognised research. After reunification in 1990, parts of this research tradition were lost due to the closing down of departments such as African philosophy, African sociology or Burmese Studies, while in parts it was incorporated into the university system of Western Germany and developed further through the opening of AS departments in the country (i.e. Southeast Asian Studies in Bonn started in 1996). Driving factors for respective fund allocation were now (a) the aim of the German government to internationalise German higher education and research, as well as (b), with regard to post-communist Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, to make use of Germany's unique position between the formerly opposing socialist and capitalist blocs by studying as well as contributing through capacity building, maintaining former/establishing new ties, etc., through to post-communist transformation processes.[6] Both aspects also have to be seen in the light of international discourses on the development of knowledge societies, which encouraged science policymaking immensely towards the internationalisation of education and research – in Europe, this culminated in the signing of the Bologna Declaration by 29 educational ministers in 1999 and the implementation of the 'Bologna Process' in the years to come.

Overall, what might be deemed 'conventional' AS in today's Germany can thus be divided into three strands, as done by Eckert (2005): (a) the classical, largely philological strand, focusing on language, literature, the arts and (pre-modern) history of (former) civilisations – regularly also termed 'Orchideenfächer' within the German university landscape; (b) the social-science strand, including political sciences, economics, sociology and human geography with a particular non-European focus and (c) the culture studies strand, bringing together research from sociology, ethnology, anthropology and the humanities with a particular focus on certain world regions. Among the latter can also be found interdisciplinary courses such as Gender Studies, diverse types of film and media studies, as well as Development Studies (see also section 2.2).

The funding line 'Area Studies', announced in 2008 by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany (BMBF), which also funds the project from which this working paper originates, encourages a stronger integration of these three AS strands in Germany, as well as a stronger linkage with 'systematic' disciplines such as political sciences, sociology and geography. It thus aims to strengthen AS in Germany, again by bridging differences between area study institutes, which justify their existence as a pool for foreign and development policy advice (see for example the German Bundesinstitut für Ostwissenschaftliche Studien (BiOSt) on studying Eastern bloc countries, the Ibero-Amerika-Institut Berlin or Asienhaus Essen), and those that largely maintain a philological orientation by studying the society, culture, language and literature of respective regions (i.e. Central Asian Studies at Humboldt Universität Berlin, Southeast Asian Studies at Bonn University). This paper hopes to contribute to these processes of integration by encouraging an explicit reflection on AS and

[6] One example of several large-scale (overall volume €8.6 million) research projects financed by the German government is the ten-year project "Restructuring Land and Water Use in Khorezm Province, Uzbekistan" (2001-2011), a project that continued to be implemented in Uzbekistan even after the events in Andijan in 2005, when all other international actors had to leave the country.

ongoing debates on its rethinking, while additionally formulating the framework for the development of 'Crossroads Studies'.

2.2 Recent reinterpretations and thematic innovations

AS was not existentially scrutinised before 1990 in either in the US or in Germany. Only as a result of the increasing impact of globalisation (Evers 2000, Prewitt 2003) and the subsequently arising influences of different evolving 'turns' in academia – the cultural turn (Lackner/Werner 1999, Bachmann-Medick 2007), spatial turn (Jessop et al. 2008, Leitner et al. 2008, Soja 1989/1996, Massey 2005) and post-structuralism (Jackson 2003a) – including post-colonial perspectives and post-development, did a debate commence on the subject. While some (Bates 1996), especially after observing that the US Social Science Research Council (SSRC)[7] and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) had terminated their area-focused committees, have predicted an end to AS as it used to be practiced – scrutinising its adequacy to contribute any insights into what was thought to be a homogenising project of globalisation – others have argued for that there should be a refocus on the subject, especially in line with globalisation's local impacts. In order to achieve this end, restructuring (Prewitt 1996, 2003; Basedau & Köllner 2007; Ellings, Hathaway et al. 2010) for the future of AS (Braig/Hentschke 2005) and a new 'AS architecture' (Appadurai 2010) are being demanded.

It was largely recognised that AS, as practiced over the decades before 1990, had become anachronistic. In the new circumstances it proved to offer a set of problematic heuristic devices for the study of objects/actors in motion, global flows and cultural processes, but without being delimited by previous established boundaries in academia and physical/assumed cultural boundaries or political borders 'out there'. One proposal voiced prominently in the debate was to undertake a shift from so-called 'trait' geographies to 'process' geographies, in order to capture the flows and motions of ideas, ideologies, discourses, people, goods, images, messages, technologies and techniques (ibid.: 5; van Schendel 2002).

The 'crisis' debate[8] brought about several innovations and specifications in AS research, for example different sorts of 'trans-' perspectives, starting with transnationalism (Glick-Schiller/Basch/Szanton-Blanc 1995, Mintz 1998, Spivak 1993), transregionalism and regional orders (Hentschke 2009, Godehardt/Lembcke 2010, Wissenschaftskolleg 2009), trans-culturalism (Center for Area Studies of FU Berlin) and translocality (Freitag/von Oppen 2010, Zitelmann 2004), with the latter preparing the ground for today's popularity of multi-sited research and its application. In addition, new research centres on Global Studies and Global History (Middell/Naumann 2010), while the analysis of 'glocal' (Robertson 1993) and diasporic connections (Schramm 2008) has been an innovative attempt to deconstruct the conventional container focus of AS and seek new levels of spatial relevance. This process has been partly aided by the de-territorialisation tendencies of traditional AS terminology (Appadurai 1996; Segbers 2000; Lewis/Wigen 1997).

[7] For a background account of the SSRC's predecessor institutions and the political motivations behind their establishment (Project Camelot, later the Centre for Research in Social Systems (CRESS)) by US government security organisations, see Bilgin/Morton 2002: 60.

[8] A rich body of literature is available on the crisis debate in AS from the particular fields of Asian Studies and, more specifically, Southeast Asian (SEA) Studies: see Burgess (2004), Jackson (2003), King (2005), Macdonald (2004), Houben (2004), van Schendel (2002). SEA-Studies were particularly vulnerable to the quest of 'area' after 1990 and to justify their field, given the relative heterogeneity (and physical 'fluidity' due to several archipelagos) of their 'area' which had always had a touch of artificiality. See also 2.3.

Renewed attention has been given to comparative studies (Basedau/Köllner 2007, Segbers 2000, Nuscheler 2000) across regions and conventional areas. Examples can be found in the establishment of centres for Peace and Conflict Studies, Regime Change and Transition Studies, European Integration Studies (ZEI) as well as Development Studies (ZEF). New collaborative research centres (CRCs) – SFB Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel (HU Berlin), SFB Governance in Räumen begrenzter Staatlichkeit (FU Berlin) – and graduate schools such as the Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies, which is a joint initiative of topic- and area-focused departments from both universities and extra-university research institutions (such as ZMO), provide evidence of the trend towards interdisciplinary research following certain thematic frames or newly (de-)constructed 'area' dispositions in a quest to look at the world differently. Preceding and attending to this development was a reactivation of the debate on the relationship between AS and 'systematic' disciplines (Guyer 2004, Graham/Kantor 2007, Hanson 2009, Mintz 1998), particularly because Disciplinarians had also diagnosed crises in their fields, albeit more vaguely than Areanists, since the very existence of the latter was threatened (Wissenschaftsrat 2000).

The conventional wisdom in the debate on AS vs. 'systematic' disciplines has revolved around two main points:

- The assumption that AS potentially challenges disciplinary fields, but at least adds empirical insights that can motivate Disciplinarians to 'improve' the validity of their concepts and theories (eye-opener function, see Puhle 2005: 5).
- With the criticism facing AS after 1990, that it was theory-distant and without 'proper' methodologies, a dialectic suggestion that 'AS adopt methodological tools and theoretical lenses from the disciplines' was subsequently added to this debate. This step was a further manifestation of the pressure Areanists faced and the need for justification and self-defence.

Related thinking eventually culminated in the view that both research approaches are interdependent, leading to statements such as "… ohne Kenntnis über die zu bearbeitende Region können keine relevanten Fragen gestellt werden und ohne Methodenkenntnis können diese Fragen nicht auf einer verallgemeinerbaren Ebene beantwortet werden" (Schwanitz 1997: 38). This quote will be commented on further below (section 2.4).

Another reaction to the crisis detection was a more fundamental restructuring of university departments in Germany. These measures followed two interrelated directions: the sorting out of relationships between the disciplinary faculties and AS chairs or existing centres from the CW-period, and examples of the establishment of new study programmes with the aim of training new types of area experts (Ellings et al. 2010) and attracting students and funding, in order to ensure the erstwhile survival of AS and to allow the field time to re-focus (Houben 2013/Crossroads-Lecture at ZEF).

2.3 Comparative insights from African, Southeast Asian and East European Studies

Consequently, intense debates on and between particular Asian studies have surfaced in the last decade in various parts of the world. As for the German academia, selected features of the well-recorded debates in African and East European Studies, as well as international voices of protagonists of Southeast Asian Studies, shall be reviewed here briefly, in order to reflect on similarities and differences in their foci regarding the reconfiguration and positioning of AS.[9] Needless to say,

[9] Given the limited space of this working paper, the debates cannot be depicted in their entirety. Rather, a cursory view is taken on the meaning and treatment of 'area', the trajectories of institutionalisation of the subjects (origin and historical evolution) and their current state of the art and outlook on the future with regard to knowledge production. While it would

respective forms of AS throughout institutionalisation have depended over time on (geo-)political trends according to related national science policies. These 'debates'[10] can be read as the result of threats to size down funding (and actual cuts) for departments and scholarly activities.

A striking difference between all three AS strands is their documented conceptualisation of the titular region/area – and thus the object of study. While representatives of African Studies seem not to have held any form of recognisable debate about space, Eastern Europe scholars have been more concerned with the construction of a territorial-cultural entity (Tornow 2005), while, in contrast, Southeast Asianists have emphasised the contrived identity of the region (Chou 2006: 123), its highly differentiated nature, fluidity and the absence of a centre. Nevertheless, any essentialist territorial area approach in African Studies which might have existed once with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa or the entire continent has given way to a highly fragmented and heterogeneous understanding of the 'discipline' as studying the people living in and originating from Africa in other parts of the world, thus including the diaspora (Schramm 2008). Furthermore, we need to take note of "the place of Africa in its global context, both historically and contemporaneously," and "foreign interests, policies and influences, as well as perceptions outside of Africa on Africa (whatever the definition of 'Africa')." "To that extent, 'Africa' is also understood as a mirror image of international relations, images, projections and their results" (Alpers/Roberts 2002: 13, quoted in Melber 2005: 370). Despite German linguists citing African Studies as an evolutionary 'discipline', as well as the background of African Studies in colonial and culturalist research[11], the subsequent 'social sciencing' of the 'discipline', its observation of de-colonisation processes and rising contention surrounding policies towards the continent as the embodiment of the Third World led to the formulation of a critical agenda and a subsequent positioning of African Studies as AS early on. For instance, the 1970 statute of the German Association for African Studies (VAD) already revealed quite an open-minded and self-reflexive attitude, stating that "Afrikanistik should be conceived as a contemporary, interdisciplinary, critical and self-reflexive project, actively engaged in collaboration with African colleagues" (Probst 2005: 416).

In contrast with African Studies, which started to form a scientific core after WW I and the related 'loss' of German colonies, scholars engaging with Eastern Europe only experienced major scientification in the 1970s. Until then, the legacy of pre-1945 German '*Ostforschung*' had connected with expansionist motives during Hitler's regime and the continued attitude of viewing the East as the inferior 'other' had prevailed, even though the previous pre-occupation with *Raum* (space) had ultimately ceased after 1945 for political reasons. As Lentz/Schmid (2005: 137) put it, with the manifestation of the Cold War the object-hood of Eastern Europe shifted from a perceived,

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have been obvious to focus on Central Asia, South Asia and Iranian Studies maybe, to cover the geographical region the Crossroads Asia network takes as its point of departure, the simple reason for not doing so is that a detectable debate on these 'areas' and their scholarship has not taken place (internationally or in Germany) to a similar degree as on the ones looked at in the following paragraphs.

[10] For the German African Studies branch of AS the debate was held mainly in the journal *Afrika Spectrum* (later *Africa Spectrum*) between 2003 and 2005 (Engel 2003, Bierschenk 2003, Bayart 2003, Reh 2003, Lölke/Simo 2004, Olivier de Sardan 2005, Neubert 2005, Melber 2005, Chabal 2005, Probst 2005). The companion piece in East European Studies is in the *Osteuropa* journal; however, here different waves of the debate can be detected. The first flared up in the 1990s and was recorded in Creuzberger et al. (2000). Subsequent positioning appeared since then in 2005 (Schlögel 2005, Unger 2005, Brahm 2005, Lentz/Schmid 2005, Kleindienst 2005), 2011 (Beichelt/Barnickel 2011), 2012 (Sapper 2012) and most recently in a special issue in 2013 (Osteuropa 2-3/2013: Grotz et al. 2013, Mommsen 2013, Troebst 2013). For an account of the debate on South East Asian Studies, a thematic edited volume has been reviewed (Chou/Houben 2006) and complemented with contributions in the first two issues of the newly established journal *TRaNS.Trans – Regional and – National Studies of Southeast Asia* (Thompson 2013, Scott 2013, Aung-Thwin 2013).

[11] See Probst (2005: 413f) for a detailed account of the role of African Studies in the Nazi regime's revanchist agenda.

contemplated and reproduced space towards a non-spatial, systemic concept, i.e. the communist world as a societal system with particular economic principles, in which spatial categories and units of analysis no longer played a role for analysis. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Eastern bloc, this political systemic space imploded and subsequently caused probably the severest identity crisis among AS specialists in the aftermath of 1989. It also prepared the ground for the rediscovery of space among East European scholars from that point onwards (Schlögel 2005). The disciplinary focus which had successively set in since the policy of détente in the 1970s (that had allowed scholarly exchange and a de-mythologising of 'the East') is reflected in the self-image of East European scholarship today as being primarily disciplinary (Grotz et al. 2013).

Although its disciplinary boundaries seem well-established, representatives of different disciplines working on and in Eastern Europe (including newly emerged area concepts such as Central Europe, East Central Europe, Eurasia, etc.) partly agree that they are seen as Areanists by 'pure' Disciplinarians (ibid.). Besides the usual challenges inherent in this divide, the ideologically-driven focus of disciplinary research has rendered its scholarly exponents marginal among other colleagues, if not completely out of step with demands to find alternative heuristic approaches for explaining myriad changes and transformations. For example, in East European political science scholarship, the domination of totalitarianism vs. modernisation and affiliated development theories became outdated, making way for so-called transition theories and democratisation studies. Their adequacy is now under new scrutiny, especially given heterogeneous political developments in the former 'East' (Mommsen 2013). The initially proclaimed 'end of East European History' (Baberowski 1998, also in Creuzberger 2000: 28-42) has given way to imaginations and scholarly programmes on Eastern Europe as a historical region (Troebst 2013). Ultimately, challenges in East European scholarship are discussed strongly along the lines of seeking new disciplinary-grounded frameworks for understanding contemporary and historical change processes.

Contemporary representatives of Southeast Asian Studies[12] are all the more critical and self-conscious of the conventional social science disciplines and can already look back at a considerable body of achievement with regard to the inductive development of theoretical concepts for local analyses[13] and the scrutinising of spatial categories (van Schendel 2002). This may be owing to the particular nature of their 'field', which cannot be grasped spatially by all means and which has been felicitously coined a "conveniently residual category" (Emmerson 1984: 17, quoted in King 2006: 33) and a 'convenient contingent device' (Sutherland 2005). Another contributory factor and a unique feature of Southeast Asian Studies has been the promotion of the 'discipline' in the region itself[14], most prominently through the creation of respective institutes such as the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore in 1971 (Chou/Houben 2006: 7) or the Asia Research Institute at

[12] A comprehensive overview of the origins and developments of Southeast Asian Studies, including identified challenges and suggestions for a re-conceptualisation, is provided in Chou/Houben (2006) and King (2005, 2006). For emerging issues on SEA scholarship see the latest articles of Hirsch (2013), Kleinen (2013), Bunnell (2013), Aung-Thwin (2013), and Rigg (2013).

[13] Examples of analytical categories that have been adopted by social sciences and derived from SEA Studies include Clifford Geertz's 'thick description', his notion of a 'theatre state', Benedict Anderson's influential concept of 'imagined communities', and the concepts of 'moral economy' and 'weapons of the weak', as elaborated by James Scott.

[14] Interestingly, and also specific to Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, founded in 1967) has been a driving force in the establishment of the 'discipline' in SEA itself. With its focus on regional economic, educational and media cooperation, some scholars argue that its reality-shaping activities through interconnections have more than anything contributed to 'making' SEA and giving it a distinct identity (Thompson 2013). However, nationalist and thus disintegrating tendencies in scholarship etc. have been observed likewise (Reynolds 1995, Heryanto 2002, both mentioned in King 2006: 29).

the National University of Singapore in 2001 and interdisciplinary study programmes in several countries in the region (Malaysia, Vietnam, etc.) – a process that is ongoing and has expanded through regional exchange programmes since.[15] As a result, and in comparison with African or East European Studies, SEA Studies today possesses the far greater potential to be dominated by discussions of local scholars able to bridge the academic West-Rest divide (including issues of cultural and linguistic translation (see 5.1), the advancement of and advocacy for local concepts on an international scholarly scene, etc.). The capacities and interests of local scholars in Africa and Eastern Europe seem to carry the weight of their respective 'Third World identity' and ideological (Cold War-systemic) academic legacies.

In terms of knowledge production, the popular idea of the respective areas being social constructs[16] seems to be uncontroversial among the representatives of the three AS branches, despite different degrees of thought and subsequent various innovations to the respective AS research agenda. Without wanting to be judgmental on the basis of an insufficient number of texts and positions reviewed, the preliminary impression is that the SEAnists' view of their region (however defined) as a heuristic device[17], depending on the particular question and research interest, yields insights that allow them to contribute substantially and proactively to the wider AS debate. In comparison, the agenda of advocates of East European scholarship is determined more by the idea of the complementary existence of area expertise with disciplinary methods and theories. It can thus be rather called reactive, because it seems to cherish disciplinary boundaries. The case of African Studies seems to be positioned in the middle of the former two, along with the peculiarity of centralisation in the field due to the institutionalisation of collaborative research centres (*Sonderforschungsbereiche*/ SFBs) over the past 20 years. The dominance of linguists and literary studies, and the subsequent feelings of an imbalance in other disciplinary branches of African Studies, has provoked the debate on questioning the legitimacy of one over the other – which, in the end, is not a fruitful venture – and pointing towards the sometimes perceived dichotomy between fundamental research and policy-relevant knowledge generation. This is reflected likewise in the lamentations of East European and Russian Studies scholars, who demand the institutionalisation of a fully-fledged research centre for the post-Soviet space (Schröder 2013).

From the future perspective, advocates of all three AS reviewed here seem at least to agree on three dimensions:

- The relevance of spatialities and their study locally, especially with a view towards how globalisation processes affect and are being affected by regional […] dynamics;
- The potential for new insights from more comparative research – in an intra-, inter- and cross-regional manner; yet, they remain to varying degrees unclear on what such a comparison should look like, based on which criteria and whether or not they are always useful;

[15] One of the most recent attempts is the creation of an Asian Studies Institute at the university in Brunei Darussalam.

[16] See the notions of Southeast Asia as knowledge construct (Kleinen 2013: 212) and demarcated as discursive field (King 2006: 25); of African Studies' scholars as social construct (Engel 2003: 111); of differentiated and hybrid spatiality detected in Eastern Europe (Lentz in Grotz et al. 2013: 100).

[17] According to Chou (2006: 131) this kind of approach goes beyond mere multi- and interdisciplinarity. The production of knowledge is to be achieved through innovative theorizing "by multi-, inter- and cross-disciplinary, and transnational discussions, as well as local experiences which may not necessarily be rooted in any one of the disciplinary bases that we academics have become so obsessed with" (ibid.). The conscious collapse of (disciplinary, geo-political and social) boundaries instead of their maintenance and defense is one other indicator likely to impact on the fruitfulness of SEAn scholarship for wider academia.

- The significance of collaborative research across disciplinary and regional boundaries as well as the need for the stronger engagement of local scholars in the debates.

2.4 Selected obscurities in the debate on Area Studies

As with any prominent and determined debate, the so-called AS debate has taken a fragmented path, mainly due to the different (institutional, disciplinary and area) backgrounds of its representatives and a plethora of national, even federal, science and educational policies with varying objectives across the globe and related to the national foreign policy priorities of individual countries. This sub-chapter is an attempt to take stock of some seemingly open and contested questions in the debate on AS. Their clarification could open up scope for redefining and repositioning AS in the current circumstances. The questions are related to at least four interdependent topics – area, AS, disciplines and interdisciplinary studies, comparison & AS – and will be introduced in this order.

AREA

A closer look at the substance of AS in the past reveals that the totalitarian claim of the topic taking a 'container approach', based on the congruency of cultural traits and geographical boundaries, cannot be upheld that easily. Three observations underlie this assumption:

- Spatial units investigated in different branches of AS across the globe included nation states, civilisations, ecological zones, continents and otherwise defined spatial regions. The examples show that apparently scale has always been treated flexibly in the AS field, most likely predetermined by the institution and tradition of the researcher's professional home, though.

  Yet, the negative side-effects of such institutional logics have been pointed out by the evolution of what van Schendel termed "geographies of knowing" vs. "geographies of ignorance." The argument is that traditional AS has produced white spots,[18] sub-areas (Zomia) at the fringes of institutionalised 'areas', marginalised by Areanists. Thus, the claim that (however defined) areas are immobile aggregates of 'traits' can be seen as justified. Also, the consequence generally deduced from this realisation, i.e. that we need process geographies (sic) instead of trait geographies, does seem plausible, as it promises to qualify certain core areas vs. marginal spaces within 'areas' of AS.[19]

[18] Often overlooked in these discussions is the fact that social sciences have likewise produced 'white spots' with their respective focus on the micro- and macro-levels, not the 'in-between', i.e. the meso-level. For example, the workings of block- and district-level politicians and bureaucracies in many countries in conventional South and Central Asia (India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan) has been largely ignored. However, to what extent this ignorance has been conditioned by 'fashions' for certain research paradigms (state vs. local) is subject to further inquiry.

[19] Van Schendel's (and Appadurai's) argument for process vs. trait geographies has been taken up prominently by many researchers and reflected upon in the search for more adequate congruities. A close reading of van Schendel himself, however, suggests that he urges the need to look at space (or specific – peripheral or marginalised – places) from their contextually and temporally changing connections, to make sense of them in a 'proper' way.

- Then again, Afghanistan (itself, of course, a 'container', see below Ch. 5) can be taken as an example which belies the idea of clear boundaries of area containers, because it is viewed sometimes as part of South Asia, Central Asia or the Middle East.[20]
  Yet, in the same vein, Afghanistan could be interpreted as the victim of a focus core in conventional AS and thus as a marginal area in all three established AS, as it does not fit or is of little interest to either one.

- Spatial structures and physical boundaries are still defined today as features of 'areas' and AS. They provide the reference frame against which it is possible to deduce and follow 'process geographies' in a world of flows and to 'jump scales' (van Schendel 2002).

In addition, most likely as a reaction to observed global disjuncture (Appadurai 2010) and a world in flux, non-academic actors such as artists, journalists, businessmen, politicians, etc. actively contribute to the social construction of areas, thus exposing the general public to ideas of conflict belts, rouge states, terror zones, etc. Huntington's populist 'Clash of Civilizations' (2003) was probably the most influential book in the last years which seems to have perpetuated an idea of cultural antagonism between two meta areas, namely 'the Rest' and 'the West'.[21]

In sum, there has never been consensus on the definition of the boundaries of certain areas among representatives of one particular branch of AS (within one country and beyond). Foci have been defined as the result of individual institutional preferences, mainly guided by the language and thematic expertise of its faculty members. This limitation leads directly to the question of the organisation of AS.

AREA STUDIES

The general claim by the Areanists is that AS has produced a superior kind of knowledge without which the disciplines would not be able to generate and advance their theories. It is even argued that AS exists due to the Western-centric nature of the disciplines (Deniz Kandiyoti in interview with Crossroads Head Office July 2013). Conversely, in the crisis debate, AS has been accused of being theory-distant and methodologically weak. It has also been claimed that they only generate case studies and do not work in a comparative manner, not even ensuring comparability with a systematic approach to case studies. These two positions disguise at least two issues:

- The underlying question as to what knowledge is being taken as relevant and important, for whom and what does it encapsulate?
  The above quote of Schwanitz 1997 (section 2.2) leads one to wonder who actually defines whether certain questions are relevant and for whom? Based on the same quote, what is implied is that:

- AS does not have any methodology/methods, whereas the 'systematic' disciplines have a full repertoire with which to reason each and every research question/interest.

The seeming confusion in the literature as to what extent AS has been conceptualised as an interdisciplinary research framework all along (which aimed at a more or less holistic capturing of all

[20] Likewise, Sudan transcends spatially and along other criteria-defined regions: the Middle East, Africa, the Muslim World and the economic periphery (Ahram 2009: 5). For examples and a discussion of cultural-religiously defined 'areas' and their study, see Arjomand (2008), Freitag (2013), Poya/Reinkowski (2008).

[21] See, for a critique of his structural ascriptions and the nexus with a modernisation theory-led world view, Kreutzmann (1999, 2008).

dimensions of a defined 'area'[22]), or where the studies have sometimes been mono-disciplinary (catchword: *kleine Fächer?*), can be traced back to distinct national institutional approaches to AS. This shows not least that the seeming remedy for a repositioning of AS after the CW, by adding inter- and trans-disciplinary emphasis, resembled old wine in new bottles. Subsequently, new emphases of this kind cannot save the AS from detected crisis manifestations (Wissenschaftsrat 2000).

The second point above serves further to support the argument that AS can never be a science as such ('systematic' discipline), as knowledge about regions can only provide contextual information and comparative disciplinary studies and – lately – help generate themes that can be studied from a 'trans-' perspective (translocalism, transregionalism, transnationalism) with multi-sited ethnography. In Germany, the favouring of the term 'Regionalstudien' and the similar rejection of 'Regionalwissenschaften' expresses this view. It encapsulates essentially the idea that AS is sub-ordinated to the so-called 'systematic' disciplines and at best organised in a way that can provide a platform for different disciplines to join in the study of social phenomena in trans- and interdisciplinary research networks etc. (Puhle 2005: 1-2). Thus, as 'Studies'-subject (e.g. Central Asian Studies, East European Studies) at universities but putatively without relevant questions, methods and principles, let alone a theoretical-conceptual canon, AS is deprived equal status in the organisation of science in Germany. It is important to note that the basis of this kind of organisation of science (with related institutional mechanisms and content, of course) does seem to stand on somewhat shaky ground if looked at from an AS perspective. Moreover, it could be deconstructed without too much difficulty, not least based on the heterogeneous academic backgrounds of the members of the Crossroads Asia network itself.

Adding to the seeming relativity of AS 'as we know it' is the fact that the debate has been largely Western-centric, with a rather embarrassing ignorance of how other, non-Western knowledge orders try to make sense of 'areas' (however defined and with whatever concept eventually substituted) to which they assign importance – whether imagined or material in character. For instance, what do we know about the organisation of AS in the Russian Federation, China, Venezuela or South Africa?[23] How can we possibly claim a holistic understanding of how AS is conceptualised elsewhere? One should admit that the same colonial patterns of subordination are present in this ignorance of the 'other'. A study of AS in non-Western contexts might be in order before a judgment can be made validly on content, rationale, institutional and organisational design. This point is closely connected to the question of research and the eligibility of certain kinds of research over others, as discussed further in Ch. 4.

In sum, there was never consensus on the degree of systematicity of AS, as AS knowledge was generated in interdisciplinary centres as well as small disciplinary-based departments with a focus on a sub-area. An incoherent view on what constitutes AS and what the studies achieve should not allow for generalising about AS's potential to develop methodologies, relevant questions and mid-range

[22] Think for example of the three AS institutes of FU Berlin (North America, Latin America, Eastern European Institute). The teaching in the latter used to include disciplinary-designed modules in six fields: political science, sociology, economy, law, history and cultural studies, thus aiming at some sort of holism and systematicity. In teaching, though, the question regarding a distinction of multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity seems valid; furthermore, the absence of methods and synthesising courses has raised doubt about to what extent interdisciplinarity was achieved here.

[23] Van Schendel's (2002: 648) claim that Central Asia emerged as new academic area in the 1990s thus comes as a bit of a surprise, especially considering that it has been an established area (Srednyaya Aziya) at least in Soviet academia for a long time, admittedly originating the same colonial impetus as has been observed elsewhere. Here also the Crossroads Asia Lecture by Steffi Marung at the Center for Development Research, Bonn, December 11, 2013 yielded interesting insights into the organisation and role of Soviet African Studies. On Soviet Oriental Studies, see Kemper/Conermann 2011.

concepts, to build up a body of literature on the basis of which it would become valid to speak of some as 'disciplines'. Instead, the conceptual and methodological diversity of AS, depending on who sits on what academic chairs, has resulted in an epistemic diversity which allows for diverse and fruitful interaction with 'systematic' disciplines.

DISCIPLINES and INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

As a matter of fact, numerous voices have lamented the crisis of disciplinary sciences around and since the early 1990s.[24] Post-structuralism, post-colonialism and post-development are only the major lines of thought that are seen as being responsible for this crisis. Again, this is related to the questions 'what/whose knowledge?', 'who defines its relevancy?' and 'how do we know what we know?' (in Knorr-Cetina's terms revealing the epistemic culture(s) of AS) on the one hand, as well as the AS vs. 'systematic' disciplines[25] debate on the other hand.

Especially in the social sciences and humanities, questions regarding research ethics – replicability and systematicity – are usually highly valued though not often practiced principles. Hans Henning Schröder (2013), in a recent comment on the status quo of East European Studies, argued that social sciences have taken a momentous shift towards positivist approaches and modelling with a greater emphasis on quantitative (large *n*) versus qualitative heuristics in the last few years. This shift seems to be largely responsible for the stresses on comparative studies, for which Areanists will have to provide neatly limited datasets which have nothing to do with an understanding of a case/place/space/culture/figuration, etc. According to Schröder, knowledge about regional developments […] has been devalued as a result. The shift towards interdisciplinary studies as a remedy where the dichotomy seems to have been dissolved was rightfully scrutinised and put to the test when the Wissenschaftsrat demanded in 2000 that institutions based in Berlin provide evidence on the surplus of interdisciplinary research. Particularly, the impression to this day is that interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity[26] are hard to achieve, while the materialisation of the respective mode of knowledge generation is more a result of learning by doing than by being brought about strategically. It is thus not surprising that questions about eclecticism and dilettantism have been raised in a number of debates.

To sum up these last observations, one might realistically qualify the relevance of disciplines, thus rendering it unnecessary for Areanists to submit themselves to disciplinary domination and subordination. As Vincent Houben put it in a recent Crossroads Lecture[27], Areanists should have more self-confidence and not become mired in 'systematic' disciplines. Their concepts and theories

[24] This has particularly been discussed in the framework of unearthing the origin of social sciences, i.e. their historical construction (including the disciplinarisation and professionalisation of knowledge and the institutionalisation of social sciences within the university system in the 19th century, which "led to the emergence of a quartet of disciplines centred around political science, economics, sociology and history" (Bilgin/Morton 2002: 57)) and their subsequent annexation during the Cold War with the result that social science became essentially a "'creature' of states, helping to also serve their policy purposes" (ibid.: 58).

[25] For a critique on the disciplines (geography, sociology, polisci, economics, anthropology) and their relation with AS on the one hand, but also disciplinary studies on the other hand, see below Ch. 4.

[26] Two definitions for trans-disciplinarity are common: 1) To include practitioners and non-academics in applied research projects in order to disseminate the results and make sure knowledge exchange and feedback loops between practical needs and theoretical research insights are real. 2) To bridge natural and social sciences in academia by working on the same themes (Pohl/Hirsch Hadorn 2007).

[27] Crossroads Lecture at ZEF titled "Space, Area Studies and Southeast Asia", 12 June 2013.

have proven largely irrelevant for AS research, which, due to their roots, are Euro- and Western-centric by default.[28]

THE QUEST FOR COMPARISON

Connected to the idea of Western- or Euro-centrism is also the difficulty that arises from the contrast in positions concerning the usefulness and conducting of comparative AS. Taking the binary of implicit and explicit comparison as a point of departure, the fact that all units of analysis in qualitative social science research are somehow socially constructed, and that even single case studies thus always include an implicit comparison given that a researcher is never free of his/her inherent biases related to academic socialisation etc.[29], demands have surfaced to make this inherent (implicit) comparison explicit (Zanker/Newbery 2013: 113). Comparative approaches vary in the nature of disciplines, and various experiences exist to apply a comparative lens in interdisciplinary research programmes. In particular, positivist political science inquiries which seek to detect causalities by isolating explanatory variables rely heavily on highly systematic comparative research designs, with the unit of analysis generated *ex ante* on the basis of deductive theorising (to test hypotheses and theories).[30] On the opposite spectrum, ethnographers and researchers applying anthropological methods, in line with their inclination to use grounded theory approaches, do not enter the field in a theory-determined[31] manner and aim instead to elaborate one the uniqueness of one or more cases which possibly can be made the object of an *ex post* comparison, albeit often in an asymmetric way because equal access to different sites may vary. Underlying this observation is the sufficiently debated question on the value of case study research vs. comparative approaches – which is most pronounced in the discussion of qualitative vs. quantitative research designs (case study/small *n* vs. large *n*) (King/Keohane/Verba 1994, George/Bennett 2005) – and the assumption that only comparative designs (no matter whether qualitative/quantitative, synchronic/diachronic, ex ante/ex post) provide a stead learning platform for researchers (Collier 1993) and generate knowledge that can be generalised – thus advancing science. While this has generated a strong quest for comparison in general, AS is additionally challenged in view of the detected pace of changes at the local level, due to globalisation influences (Chou 2006: 132). It should be noted, however, that the latter requirement can be met also if observed micro processes (single cases) are thoroughly reflected upon and related to macro phenomena (contexts of (regional) globalisation), which does not constitute a comparison in the narrow sense. Other possible approaches for comparative AS differ in scale and their degree of involvement.

[28] This said, it is worth pointing out Jackson's contributions to the debate (Jackson 2003, 2003a). He offers evidence on the "dual crises of Asian Area Studies and Cultural Studies," calling for a reconfiguration of spatiality instead of its abandonment and for a transculturation of post-structuralism. The latter argument is attributable (by him) to the detected potential of Western-derived post-structuralist approaches to obscure differences within and between 'areas' or locations, even though post-structuralism is widely claimed to be the remedy for large-scale ignorance of difference (Jackson 2013a: 45ff). Accordingly, what is needed today is a "theoretically sophisticated area studies based on the idea that forms of cultural and discursive difference remain bounded within multidimensional spatialities" (Jackson 2003: 7).

[29] Thinking further, it is suggested that "the basis and forms of comparison often reproduce hierarchies of judgment," because all too often Europe is taken as the (implicit) reference point for comparison (Sidaway 2013: 995).

[30] For an overview of the discussion on the nexus (and its potentials) of AS and comparative political science, see Mehler 2011.

[31] The notion of theory-determined vs. theory-led is adopted from Sayer (2010: 83).

Of the three types of comparative AS Ahram (2009: 32) offers in the table depicted below – with examples taken from political science – the comparison of area entities (methodological regionalism) faces the dual dilemmas of definition and boundary drawing (see above).[32]

	Intra-regional comparison	**Inter-regional comparison**	**Cross-regional comparison**
Object of comparison	Comparing entities within areas	Comparing different areas as analytical units/entities	Comparing entities from different areas
Examples	Political parties in southern Africa	Regional co-operation in Asia and Latin America	Resource-rich countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East

Source: Ahram (2009: 32)[33]

The comparison of entities within and across areas has the potential to dissolve this dilemma (in the wake of a 'Post-AS approach'), although the question of definition remains to an extent, in that the heuristic value of the applied area perspective has to be explained (ibid.: 9). Put differently, the underlying assumptions of why phenomena should be compared within a particular (sub-)region[34] or across several regions, and what this perspective promises to yield in terms of academic insights, should be made explicit. Needless to say that such research programmes are unlikely to be accomplished by single researchers, but instead require extensive cooperation among scholars offering different skills and competencies.

The limits of comparison become even more pronounced if entanglements are the object of study, moreover, in a historical perspective, because the beginning and end (temporal boundaries) are possibly even harder to grasp. Research on trans-local/-national phenomena in multi-sited settings seems to have been one recent approach that does successfully avoid the need for a systematic comparative perspective. In the words of Sidaway, the urge to compare might be comfortably offset by seeking "analytical approaches that travel the globe, not in search of comparison, but to trace genealogies of co-production" (2013: 996, citing Monghia 2007: 411).

2.5 Do not abandon, but modernise and revitalise: the BMBF initiative and other competence networks' approaches

On finding conventional AS anachronistic as follows:

- Physical space (scalar fix) in times of globalisation, also considering the spatial turn;
- Symbolic space, given the deconstruction of culture (cultural turn) and a subsequent reformation of disciplines and research agendas, as well as acknowledging that global impacts of disjuncture cannot be understood without proper training in respective competences;

[32] This relates not only to the socially constructed character and relative 'arbitrariness' of regions in question ('areas are not facts, but artefacts' (Chou 2006:135)), but also to issues regarding the dominance of certain localities within areas (e.g. Russia in Eastern Europe, however the latter is defined; the problematic of borderlands etc.) and, thus, to questions of situatedness/positionality and perspective. Even political scientists struggle with clear area conceptions, for example the MENA region (see Mehler 2011).

[33] A time dimension could be added to the table, e.g. the diachronic vs synchronic comparison within.

[34] See also Jackson (2003a: 64) for advantages of 'cross-cultural' studies that draw on the notion of difference within vs difference between.

- Institutional space, which is dominated by scholarly lineages that limit knowledge generation as a result of organisation in self-referential epistemic communities and adherence to disciplinary subordination,[35]

a full-scale restructuring in line with the modernisation and revitalisation of AS was sought. The urgency lent itself to the fact that even though the obvious relevance of new scales was acknowledged and readily adopted in various research programmes[36], the latter two dimensions demanded a reconsideration of possible underlying concepts (the knowledge production dimension) and not least support for institutional reconfigurations to provide Areanists with a vital perspective.

The recommendations of the Wissenschaftsrat (2006) for AS in Germany thus aimed at an institutional strengthening and at enabling efforts to concentrate AS within the framework of larger research networks and new centres dedicated to the field. In particular, interdisciplinary AS centres, to be based at universities, were suggested to be able to synthesise AS expertise and disciplinary knowledge production. For AS-relevant training it was suggested to develop AS curricula for the BA phase, albeit with sound disciplinary training (in at least one discipline), and to systematically create opportunities for students to learn a language and integrate stays abroad into the curriculum, in order to ensure basic exposure to the field of study and to gain respective cultural expertise (Wissenschaftsrat 2006: 29-42).[37] Overall, and in line with the aims of the EU-Bologna process of increasing the 'employability' of university graduates, these modifications would increase job market orientation.

The BMBF AS initiative, launched in 2008, can be interpreted as a response to the various recommendations of the Wissenschaftsrat. It has so far funded two rounds of project proposals, as well as an extension for another two years for those funded in the first round: the Crossroads Asia network was among the first successful applications. Annex A1 provides an overview of the so far established seven research networks and nine university-based (new) AS centres in Germany.[38]

3. The Crossroads Asia-approach: rethinking Area Studies

Responding to the challenge to reconfigure AS, as intended by the BMBF, researchers from the Crossroads Asia network proposed to pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach by taking thematic figurations as the basis of individual work packages. At an aggregate level it was hoped that following figurations and different kinds of flows would highlight that – qualitatively – different spaces evolve around the real and imagined interactions of individuals (Lefebvre 1991), possibly featuring

[35] The distinction between the three ways to make sense of an academic area was adopted from van Schendel (2002: 649-650).

[36] Among the newly evolved scalar innovations were, for example, Pacific Rim Studies, Studies of Borderlands/Border Studies, the study of Ocean Spaces, e.g. Indian Ocean Studies, and concepts such as Silk Roads or Black Athena (Sidaway 2013: 990). On the contrary, though also a new perspective, Atlantic Studies scholars do not consider themselves Areanists, the reason being (interestingly) that "this approach [AS] is a reflection of the study of the self rather than a study of the other, as is conventional in the origins of AS" (Campbell 2012: 2). At the same conference one participant proposed that world city research could possibly replace AS (ibid.: 3).

[37] For recent attempts at a first stocktaking, see the conference reports of Campbell (2012), Schwab (2012) and Christov (2012).

[38] The overview is meant to provide some background information on the approaches of the other successful applications in the funding line. It indicates the web address for each of the networks/centres for further information. This is not the place to discuss and possibly 'evaluate' other projects. However, what is remarkable is that none of the funded projects scrutinises space as such as could be done given the academic discussion on "theorizing spatial relations" (Jessop/Brenner et al. 2008) and "jumping scales" (van Schendel 2002).

characteristics that do not (only/necessarily) fully fit available concepts of translocality, for example. The collective research endeavour was envisaged to be a 'work in progress' and more so a testing ground than a reliance on certainties.

The innovative idea was not – as perceptions of outsiders who see the prefix *post-* have tended to assume – to abandon AS completely, but to rethink the field. To pre-empt another common misperception: Crossroads Asia, though it was stated to refer to the geographical area ranging from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India (on the first page of the application document), does not construct a new 'container' or invent a new 'area', neither a space called Crossroads Asia nor places 'in Crossroads Asia'. Instead, the term 'Crossroads Asia' is meant to be a research paradigm accounting for flows originating in the (inter-)actions of human individuals (with others wherever located in the world, even outside the above mentioned geographical space) residing in this not clearly bounded geographical zone. Admittedly, it was argued in the proposal that the delimitation for this particular region – which was conceptualised vaguely with transcending fringes on purpose – followed historically traceable trajectories of movement and mobility across and beyond the core territory in question. Yet, this argument is well in line with what Appadurai (2013: 66) recently stated about the need to "recognise that histories produce geographies and not vice versa". Conventional AS, with the tendency "to mistake a particular configuration of apparent stabilities for permanent associations between space, territory and cultural organisation" (Appadurai 2000: 7), has often approached research according to the opposite logic, thus ending up deadlocked in a scalar fix (van Schendel 2002).

Crossroads Asia, as a research paradigm, and thus as the idea of 'Crossroads Studies' posited here, distances itself from conventional AS approaches that focus on fixed territories demarcated by clear, political borders and assumed to be characterised by certain elements found on the inside. Instead, Crossroads Studies move human action and interaction and its role in communicatively constructing space at the centre of attention. After two and half years of research, the original focus on different forms of mobility and networks as studied spatial dimensions suggests the additional inclusion of positionality (socio-spatial; us/them) and borders/boundaries/frontiers, assessed through the lens of human communication taking place in interactions, into the core of analysis. The assessed spatialities of human action, and thus the emic definitions of space and consequently of 'area', are no longer shaped only by the movement of people, goods and ideas (mobilities) in and through, for instance, networks. Additionally, these forms of mobility, and the networks facilitating them, are part of a constant process of negotiation. The objects of negotiation are political borders, just as much as socio-cultural boundaries, which determine the precise shapes taken by mobilities and networks. Yet the subjects of negotiation, the actors themselves, are involved in the actions taken towards defining space, influenced by their own position, just as much as we, the researchers, are of course influenced in our assessments by our own (Western, disciplinary, female/male, etc.) positions. It is therefore in this triad of following local definitions of space, by studying (a) mobilities and networks (the dynamic) on the one hand and (b) borders/boundaries (the negotiated static) on the other, in order to (c) rethink AS by means of strengthened interdisciplinarity, that (d) socio-spatial, just as much as disciplinary positionality, has come to play a crucial role in our debates on 'Crossroads Studies'.

As pointed out in the introduction, we consciously locate ourselves and 'Crossroads Studies' as a research paradigm (while more reflection is required, see section 4) at the centre of what Knorr-Cetina (1999: 12) as well as Dupré (1983) and Galison and Stump (1996) call "the disunity of science": basically, the concern that with the increasing specialisation and professionalisation of science, and

as a consequence of the division between and institutionalisation of growing numbers of different disciplines, the disciplinary and institutional boundaries created result in the growth of knowledge, yet with this knowledge being disintegrated, separate parts prevent us from seeing the bigger picture. It is this separation of AS from 'systematic' disciplines – evolved over centuries and partly very justified – that has today resulted in shortcomings in both camps. In the 'systematic' disciplines a continuing focus on Western and Northern countries, and thus a relative disconnection from the rest of the world can be detected whereas in AS a continued focus on geographically fixed 'regions' and the originally there to be found languages and cultures is tangible, neglecting that mobility patterns, globalisation and localisation processes etc. have opened these spatial AS containers to a degree that, for example, so-called South Asia might sometimes be more present in London than in New Delhi, etc. This effect of AS and 'systematic' disciplines, due to their disciplinary development through being blinded by their own focus, drives our aim for a conscious integration of AS and 'systematic' disciplines. We attempt to do so, as outlined above, through thematic foci (currently on 'conflict', 'migration' and 'development' through the lens of mobilities and increasingly on 'borders/boundaries/frontiers' and 'mobilities/mobilisation processes' through the lens of communicative processes of human interaction). Crossroads therefore does not depict a region for us, but instead a research paradigm focusing on the interplay between the dynamic and the static, the flows (mobilities) and the blockades (borders) along Asia's crossroads as well as the crossroads at the interface of AS and 'systematic' disciplines.

The following three subsections summarise the main elements of the Crossroads Asia research paradigm as designed in the initial proposal (in italics[39] and annotated with a few comments, if deemed necessary). It is mainly meant for readers to recall the initial assumptions, in order to allow for reflection while reading the remaining document.

3.1 Focus on mobility and agency in figurations: neither a container nor cultural essentialism

The aim of the competence network is to look at specific causal and functional connections – figurations – which are localised in the area covered by the research paradigm Crossroads Asia[40] but can stretch beyond the bounds of the geographical region sketched out above or be confined to smaller areas within this region. The post-area studies perspective makes it possible to focus on specific spaces constituted by human experience, imagination and actions in contexts which are thematically defined in each case (Lefèbvre 1991). We chose to focus on the overarching topic of mobility. This is the thread which will run through all the activities of the competence network, providing a unifying perspective, and the lens through which the region will be viewed. The research paradigm Crossroads Asia deals with a sphere of action made up of complex interdependencies, constituted by the interactions of local residents across spatial, cultural and social boundaries. The lens 'mobility' allows causal connections to be made between the three topic areas which are central to the Crossroads Asia project – 'conflict', 'migration' and 'development.'

[…]

[39] Footnotes and references are ignored here (literature not indicated in the reference list at the end of this paper).

[40] Admittedly, the initial project proposal was still using the term 'Crossroads Asia' in the way that suggested it would address a spatial entity of some sort. Since the Crossroads members discussed this issue in their very first workshops and decided to refrain from this way of talking about Crossroads Asia, but to call it a 'research paradigm' instead, the text has been amended for display here accordingly.

The basis for bringing selected figurations to the fore and examining them is what constitutes the lens 'mobility'. Movement – the flows of people, goods and ideas in networks and the effects which result – makes it possible to identify the actors and structures that constitute the interconnectivity of space (Canzler et al. 2008, Urry & Sheller 2006, Urry 2000). In the geographical region covered by the Crossroads Asia research paradigm, many mobile phenomena such as migration across borders and migrants' remittances, or the 'wandering' of ideas and discourses across states, ethnicities, languages and other borders, are strikingly evident. These phenomena can be recorded empirically (as can other, possibly less evident phenomena) with correspondingly 'mobile' methods, which should be limited neither by the borders of disciplines nor by those of states (Urry 2007). It is rather the case that thematically constituted areas of investigation form and inform the scholarly frame of reference used for the analyses.

Mobility as a lens through which figurations can be made visible

We define mobility as the interactions between the social and spatial movement (flows) of people and things (material and immaterial resources, ideas, knowledge, and values) through reciprocal exchanges within and between networks. Mobility is realised in figurations – webs of ties which can be part of (and/or result from) globalisation processes. According to thematic weightings, different regional connections within the geographical core zone covered by the Crossroads Asia research paradigm have some relevance. In the area of conflict, different figurations can be identified, for example – on the macro level – from Fergana Valley, through Afghanistan and into Kashmir. For studies centring on livelihoods, an exploration of fragile and vulnerable regions such as the high mountain zones in the Altai Mountains, the Hindu Kush, Karakorum and the Southern Himalayas could be promising. The investigation into flows of migrants seeking work and education, and the spread of religiously-motivated movements, will cast light onto the relationships between cities in the geographical region covered by the Crossroads Asia research paradigm; the boundaries of the space examined 'grow' outwards in parallel with the sphere of action in this case, and could spread beyond Iran, Pakistan and the Gulf region to encompass cities around the world. Diaspora, travel and communication networks can easily stretch to Mecca, Singapore, Sydney, Berlin or Washington. In this sense, the space to be examined by Crossroads Studies can extend far beyond the geographical core of the region covered by the Crossroads Asia research paradigm.

The term 'flows', as used in the following, denotes all exchange processes. Building on Castells' work (2001, 467) we see flows as purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political and symbolic structures of society. We include migration – the movement of actual people – among these flows.

In selecting a research topic belonging to one of the themes 'conflict', 'migration' or 'development' and researched through the lens of mobility, each individual project investigates a figuration or figurations. The specific people or groups of people that interact with each other in a given figuration, and the parameters of each figuration, must be identified in each case. As such, figurations which can be researched empirically from the experientially and operatively relevant precipitate of what is constituted by mobility, for example religious or marriage networks. The specific questions which are to be explored and the insights sought in looking through the lens of mobility provide the key which opens up the concrete space for investigation. This fundamentally post-territorial perspective can be stretched to the extent that even spaces which are perceived purely 'virtually' (as 'imagined' spaces),

as they can be traced through the mental maps of many people damned to immobility, can be conceived of as topics of investigation.

3.2 Cross-cutting themes: conflict, migration and development

The research programme of the competence network focuses on thematic figurations induced by mobility that relate to the three – empirically closely intertwined – themes of 'conflict', 'migration' and 'development.' The choice of these three main themes for the work of the competence network Crossroads Asia results from their socio-political and global relevance, which is not fundamentally new but has nevertheless historically constituted the region covered by the research paradigm Crossroads Asia…

3.3 Crossroads Studies

The dominant conceptual idea behind the competence network is that a change which takes place at one location within a figuration affects the entire ensemble. Traffic lights changing colour at metaphorical junctions or 'crossroads' can accelerate dynamic change ('green'), delay it ('amber') or lead to complete stasis, at least temporarily ('red'). If the Crossroads Studies approach proves its worth in the Crossroads Asia project, a model which could be used in other post-Area Studies' competence networks in the future will thus have been established.

[…]

The competence network suggested herein takes these approaches and extends them conceptually in testing a blueprint for Crossroads Studies. Empirical and theoretical work during the four-year project phase should determine whether Crossroads Studies, as a new research approach, can also usefully be applied to the study of other regions in the world that are characterised by complex webs of ties ('network societies'). In the spirit of a post-area studies scholarly approach, we understand causal and functional connections within the geographical region covered by the Crossroads Asia research paradigm – which emerges for us as a sphere of action and as an area of study through these connections between acting, thinking and perceiving people – as 'figurations' (Elias 1970: 2) As such, small changes in one place can cause shifts and reconfiguration elsewhere. This is induced by mobility, which is an omnipresent constant in the concerned geographical space and thus can bracket individual projects together and serve as an ideal lens for our overarching project. For example, a natural disaster affecting a limited area might cause people to flee from the land, thus creating increased population pressure and strain on resources elsewhere, thus increasing the potential for conflict. Crossroads Studies, as we understand the field, occupies itself with figurations which we have specifically chosen to cover the three themes of 'conflict', 'migration' and 'development.' The aspect of this approach which turns simple post-area studies into Crossroads Studies is our assumption that changes on the macro, meso or micro level in crossroads zones such as the one covered by the research paradigm Crossroads Asia – changes which can be seen metaphorically as the changing of traffic lights at a crossroads – have the power to trigger refigurations or new figurations by affecting decisive constituents in figurations, be it by adding dynamism ('green'), interrupting progress ('amber') or blocking it altogether ('red'). One example for this notion would be the sealing of the southern border of the Soviet Union after 1930, another event which has shaped the reality, discourse and consciousness of international intervention in Afghanistan since 2001.

The extra gains made by bundling individual studies into a competence network – over and above the sum of the empirical results reached on the composition and logic of individual figurations – result

from the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the myriad entangled dynamics in a crossroads zone from the transdisciplinary examination of these through the lens of mobility. This conceptual leap from an empirically-founded, descriptive conception of Crossroads Asia to an operative conception (Bachmann-Medick 2007) of Crossroads Studies should be achieved within the framework of the competence network. If this is successful, Crossroads Studies can then be deployed as a research approach to understanding thematic figurations in other regions of the world – one with the potential to make overlapping areas and condensation points visible and ripe for analysis.

4. Discussion: locating 'us' in the debates

4.1 Reflecting on the substance and meaning of Area Studies

Based on the above – albeit reductionist – background on the substance of conventional AS and some thoughts on open questions in the debate, the following ideas have been identified as starting points for the discussion of our own identity and how we locate ourselves in the debate; in short, who are we and which positions we represent with our research and beyond.

4.1.1 Self-confidence vs. dichotomies and 'post-disciplinarianism'

Departing from the above (see 2.4) posed questions of 'what is relevant knowledge?/whose knowledge are we talking about?/what does it encapsulate?' and the subsequent discussion on the organisation and substance of AS (including its branches' potential to take on what was preliminarily called 'disciplinary' features), three issues will be posed for discussion below. These are related to the idea that if we declare the dichotomy between AS and 'systematic' disciplines redundant and not valid for our reasoning, what is left for Areanists/AS and/or for the disciplines?

The dichotomy could be abandoned for the sake of not perpetuating 'the other', i.e. 'systematic' disciplines through a constant debate on what AS gains from them, or the other way around. The underlying rationale lies with the equal detection of a crisis of various disciplines (see 2.4), which respective attempts at revitalisation would only provide an opportunity to reconfirm the established hierarchies of disciplines over everything so far termed 'AS'. As Sayer (1999) has rightly pointed out, "elsewhere around us we see and detect processes of de-differentiation", but in the disciplines and in academia this process is sought to be reversed. Why also the seemingly obvious solution to instead turn to interdisciplinary studies (Development Studies, Migration Research, Conflict Research etc.[41]) is not satisfactory, will be discussed below.

The first point to be made is a summary of critiques on what Sayer (1999) called the disciplines' 'imperialism' and 'parochialism', which – according to his claim – both make it extremely hard for Disciplinarians to think outside their disciplinary boundaries, and which subsequently support the argument for 'post-disciplinarity' (ibid.). The main line of argument is that although disciplines at times ask worthwhile questions, these are rather one-sided (abstract) and do not aim at understanding a phenomenon fully and from different perspectives, but instead confine themselves to dimensions which are (a) likely to raise the profile within the own guild (discipline) informed by the logic of disciplinary loyalties and institutional frameworks of rewards etc., and thus (b) will stop

[41] It is noteworthy that these interdisciplinary studies have already achieved qualifying as disciplines, due to their institutionalisation in universities/research centres with the respective infrastructure (journals, conferences, chairs, professorships, funding lines, etc.).

at conventional disciplinary boundaries. Under these premises single disciplines tend to "externalize difficult problems" and "deny that there is anything they need to know about on the other side of the boundary" (ibid.). While parochialism thus stands for 'disciplinary self-censorship', disciplinary imperialism refers to the tendency of disciplines to claim the sole right to interpret topics also tackled by others – despite their own approach limitations. Stereotypical examples are the declarations of sociologists that everything is socially constructed, economists' main focus on rational choice as an explanation for all kinds of phenomena and geographers' insistence on the synthesising gaze of their perspectives on space by default. The reminder that disciplines have only evolved relatively recently, and a look back at pre-disciplinary studies whose main protagonists (i.e. Alexander von Humboldt, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Adam Smith etc.) are today claimed to be the founders of disciplines by several competing disciplinary establishments, suggest that there is validity in strategically ignoring the disciplines and their boundary shuffles in academic reasoning – and that it might be worth a try. This would not necessarily have to mean also ignoring research ethics and criteria for scientific work.

Similarly, and this is the second point, Houben urges Areanists to be more self-confident and not to "[get bogged] down [in] disciplinary, abstract concepts" (Crossroads Lecture, 12 June 2013). The idea is that if we abstain from the positivist methodological approaches of 'models and hypotheses' for artificial categories such as 'state', 'nation', 'society' etc., scope will open up for the empirical deduction of mid-level/-range concepts and theory-building from insights into local situations, dynamics and relations. Houben recommends initially constructing hypotheses from empirical insights, in order to establish evolving mid-range concepts that could potentially be tested in other locations or multi-sited research and translocal settings. At this point it might be valid to ask/discuss how much such concepts are then 'area-specific' – providing patterns and mid-level theoretical building blocks not only for selected local situations but also for 'areas' as such.[42] Furthermore, and contradicting Houben in his claim that mid-range concepts can be developed in ignorance of abstract disciplinary concepts, Macdonald (2004) argues that AS cannot achieve being a science in its own right, particularly because all concepts that are ever derived resemble the known – ingrained in the researcher through his/her socialisation and academic and otherwise training: "Facts do not lend themselves to explanation […] one has to build it […]. A hypothesis or a model is an organised set of concepts that leads to an explanation of a local phenomenon; the concepts are in themselves not local, but are derived from anthropology, logic, cognitive studies, sociology, psychology, linguistics and other fields of study" (ibid.: 4). One consequence of Macdonald's view would be to give more significance to training the younger generation of researchers in critical and reflexive thinking, in order to enable them to think analytically and 'see from within' (to build hypotheses and come up with mid-range theories based on empirical research). This nevertheless requires conscious and continuous tutoring of PhD students in the fields of research methods, research ethics, power imbalances in research, communication skills, etc. – before going into the field, during their field research (including at least one, if not several visits of the tutor in the field) and after. This point has consequences for future budgets, teaching and tutors' time.

Interestingly, Sayer (1999) also offers some critique on interdisciplinarity, suggesting that, at times, interdisciplinary research might be just window-dressing, labelled as such to cover up hidden agendas, most often the "attempts of participants to raise their own standing." Related to AS, this

[42] The renewed emphasis on 'area' here is because Houben himself does not want to give it up, though he speaks of the liquid quality of SEA as 'area'. This makes one suspect some kind of essentialism in his approach.

might incur where disciplinary projects are announced to engage with the disciplines and where the latter gain prestige through empirical data and 'culture', whereas Areanists enhance their reputation through 'theory' and methods. This does not yet even refer to the content and knowledge (its interdisciplinary quality) generated by the joint collaboration between both. An additional critical point rejects the common attitude that claims only researchers with as good training as Disciplinarians can work interdisciplinarily. Sayer counters this argument based on his own experience working at length on a coherent group of topics or questions without regard to disciplinary boundaries, thus suggesting that it would work out well, particularly for fields such as Urban Studies and Regional Studies. For the Crossroads network, and as formulated in section 6 of this paper, it remains to be discussed whether we could follow such pathways leaning towards post-disciplinary research, or similar approaches.

Post-disciplinary studies in this context "emerge when scholars forget about disciplines and whether ideas can be identified with any particular one" discipline. The clue is rather in a researcher's identification with learning, following "ideas and connections wherever they lead instead of following them only as far as the border of their [researchers'] discipline" (ibid.). The close resemblance to the figurational approach of the Crossroads Asia research paradigm is remarkable, with 'Crossroads' emphasising the crossing of political borders just as much as disciplinary boundaries. Last but not least, Sayer assures the reader that following connections and reasoning comprehensively in no way equate to dilettantism or eclecticism ('ending up doing a lot of things badly'), because the research interest guides the way.

4.1.2 Positionality and boundary works

Somewhat offsetting the provocative tone of and contrasting with the previous section, the next paragraphs will introduce the idea and concept of positionality as a means of making sense of spatial and social relationality surrounding knowledge production. Positionality is closely related to questions of boundary settings and enacting (further called 'boundary works') because, as an additional spatial perspective[43], its consideration scrutinises and qualifies conventional taken-for-granted boundaries (not only) in AS and raises awareness of and reflection on the boundary-producing and re-producing processes through knowledge regimes on the one hand, and empirically detectable daily practices in research sites on the other hand.

In academia, debates about positionality[44] have gained ground since the late 1980s. Especially feminist researchers (Haraway 1988/1991, England 1994, Franks 2002, Alcalde 2007) have highlighted the situatedness of scholars and of knowledge production by reflecting on their (own) role of the 'self'[45] ('position' as determined by race, nationality, age, gender, social and economic status, sexuality etc.) in data generation and how this most likely impacts on the formation of knowledge as a product of empirical analysis. As Haraway put it, "positioning is […] the key practice grounding knowledge because 'position' indicates the kind of power that enabled a certain kind of knowledge" (Haraway 1991: 193 quoted by Rose 1997: 308). With regard to AS – a set of conventional knowledge regimes and products/constructs of situationally-generated data (Kleinen 2013: 121) – the systematic inclusion of reflection on the partiality, limited coverage and outlook of

[43] Positionality is counted as one type of spatiality, the others being place, scale, networks and mobility. According to Leitner/Sheppard/Sziarto (2008), no type is superior to another; instead, they are seen as co-implicated in complex ways.
[44] Broadly speaking, the idea of positionality reflects the acknowledgement that the definition of 'something' is only possible in interrelation with the 'other', definition and characterisation of a thing is conducted through distinction and, thus, boundary-marking/-setting, in order to establish difference and specificity.
[45] This 'putting myself in relation' is reminiscent of Charles Taylor's idea of a subjective turn. See Taylor (1991: 26).

its paradigms, as well as institutional and ideological dispositions of its agents (researcher and researched subjects/'objects'), holds the potential to achieve greater transparency in how power is distributed unequally in area-focused knowledge generation, for example between subjects/'area' and researcher/AS, between different academic cultures and differently organised national knowledge systems (see below).

Positionality is often seen as manifesting spatially – at different geographical scales and through distance/proximity; however, the social positioning ('othering' based on distinct identities, experiences and perspectives of differently positioned subjects) and the time dimension are no less important and all three perspectives constitute each other mutually.[46] Underlying these notions are boundary-drawing processes established by interrelations between differently positioned subjects who have distinct understandings of the world in line with their different positions in space (including linguistic/'area'), time, social-economic status and disciplinary belonging and thus possess differentiated power positions. Sheppard (2002) and Jackson (2003) have highlighted analytical subject positions which have become popular in AS and Western social sciences. Accordingly, the most obvious focus of inquiry is post-colonialism, because it embodies the critique of hegemonic Western conceptualisations of the world and emphasises the importance of positionality and unequal power relations from which struggles over interpretation and meaning[47] in (putative universal) scholarship have derived (Sheppard 2002: 321). Adding to post-colonialism as the "subject position *of* the West," Jackson (2003: 75) moreover detected the diasporic focus as an analytical subject position '*in* the West' and the subaltern reading as '*constructed by* the West' in cultural studies. Needless to say, each subject position does entail its own type of spatiality which allows only a partial or incomplete picture of interrelations to become visible. Moreover, a fourth subject position – one untouched by Western influence – apparently cannot be captured with conventional methods, i.e. from the ontological and epistemological stance characteristic of conventional AS.

That said, a debate around reflexivity (Rose 1997, Robertson 2002) has evolved jointly with concepts of positionality. Reflexivity offers the possibilities to – and actually demands that researchers – reflect consciously on their differently situated positions. As a result, the situated nature of all knowledge is obvious, thereby challenging the idea of objectivity (Sheppard 2002: 318). What is more, an acknowledgement of the situatedness of knowledge production does not allow generalising and the drawing of universal conclusions (anymore) – a finding that shakes up the 'systematic' disciplines and their claim for universal, non-area-based knowledge generation. Thus, this kind of reflexivity and reappraisal of conventional AS against the background of positionality places under scrutiny many prominent existing boundary settings and common processes of boundary-enacting. Furthermore, it qualifies boundaries and urges a scholarly focus on the processes of boundary creation and reproduction through discourse, ontological stances and epistemological approaches.

While positionality is multi-scalar and enacted through interrelations between places and people, via flows etc., boundary-weakening and -creating processes constitute one of the most promising fields

[46] To avoid possible misunderstandings which might arise after reading up on the positionality debate in geographic journals alone, it is stressed here that scale is not only manifest in physical distance, but, respectively, dimensions of social scale should be considered. See the paragraph above regarding the reflectivity taken on by feminist scholars. In addition, the intensity and nature of interconnectedness qualifies all scalar concepts (Sheppard 2002: 324).

[47] How this links with issues of 'translation' – in both the linguistic and also the broader, cultural sense – see further below in this section and Chapter 5.1.

for inquiry. Against this backdrop it is necessary to discuss the notion of 'boundary' with regard to rethinking AS. In the following, four main types of boundaries are reflected upon briefly:

a) boundaries demarcating conventional areas in AS;
b) boundaries demarcating the apparent divide between 'systematic' disciplines and AS;
c) boundaries within AS and boundaries demarcating different AS; plus
d) boundaries between academia, the wider public, policymakers and practitioners.

Ad (a) boundaries demarcating the conventional areas in AS[48]

Much has been said already regarding the arbitrariness of boundaries between areas and the geopolitical context for the boundary-establishment of areas in and for conventional AS. At this point it is thus merely necessary to again stress that all frames of reference, including the spatial, constitute contingent, necessary abstractions (see, for example, the definition of SEA as a convenient residual category in 2.3). Consequently, even if van Schendel (2002) calls for flow studies, these would need to include reflections on several dimensions: time, space, the position of the observer and the observed, etc. Taken further, and very much in line with the initial Crossroads Asia concept note's figurational approach ('following the interactions of people'), the construction of a defined 'area' or unit of observation is most expediently undertaken when guided by the research question/interest the researcher is trying to understand. Depending on the figuration, such a perspective opens up new avenues of research, among them 'South-South' relations (in all their arbitrariness), for example.

A 'post-AS approach' would refrain from (re-)constructing any kind of 'meta' areas.[49] However, it is valid and maybe worthwhile to actually ask for the meaning of conventional areas and AS for 'others'. How do others, in what are often still treated as certain areas or spaces of real and imagined interactions, make sense of their surroundings? Do they see it in spatial (politically or socially defined) 'area' terms or what are relevant perspectives from 'below'? How does the world look from other locations (South-North instead of North-South) and with other dispositions (social, cultural, national, etc.)? Furthermore, how are discourses bounded spatially and how do they reflect fields of power and knowledge?

An interesting case in point which illustrates the dynamic of 'belonging' to an area (or not) from below is Zaidi's analysis of Pakistan's location and identity (Zaidi 2009). He detects a desire (assigned to Pakistan and its elites) not to belong to any one particular region despite geography, location and history (ibid.: 36). Interestingly, the evolution of an extra-locational identity is portrayed as a result of influences connected to mobility and movements. For example, the greater influence of (Wahhabi) Islam, due to the labour migration of Pakistani workers in the Gulf states and the fostering of Urdu as the medium of communication among the different workers with Pakistani origin, with repercussions on the wider use of Urdu at home (instead of e.g. Punjabi in Punjab)[50], has contributed to a shift in identity and perceived belonging from South Asia towards the Middle East via a greater Islamic identity, among other factors. Similar processes can be assumed to have taken place in other

[48] This implies more than just the change of focus from trait to process geographies mentioned earlier. Given that flows and movement are not everywhere, factors of contingency and relationality have to be considered as well for boundary-weakening and -crafting processes. See Jones/Woods 2013: 39.

[49] This is in contrast to positions which stick to the idea of 'area' – essentialised either through homogeneity or diversity of factors (e.g. Houben) – rather than site-based research in ('new') localities (Jones/Woods 2013). However, both positions are not mutually exclusive.

[50] Here, linguistic boundaries between areas and within areas become visible. See section 5.1 below for further reflections.

'conventional' areas and sub-areas. The question is therefore whether these are not more or in any way equally as meaningful as frames of reference in comparison with conventional 'area containers'.[51]

Ad (b) boundaries demarcating the apparent divide between 'systematic' disciplines and AS

Given what has been said above on the bias of the so-called 'systematic' disciplines on Western Europe, the US and OECD countries more broadly, the related detected crisis within the disciplines ('inside-out') and calls for, as well as already available experiences with inter-, trans- and even post-disciplinary approaches, which have proven to be heuristically very fruitful, the boundaries between disciplines and AS appear porous at least. Seen from such an angle, they can be deemed almost negligible were there not the institutional underpinnings of the manifestation of disciplines vs. AS at universities (professorships, chairs, funding lines etc.). More precisely, the quest to establish frames of reference according to the research interest and related criteria in larger research clusters (interdisciplinary frameworks of larger research projects, for example) demands a somewhat post-disciplinary approach (see above), which does not imply abandoning disciplinary theory-building and concepts but relating them more actively with concepts of other disciplines and making efforts at 'disciplinary' translations to other academics and practitioners. Ultimately, the site-based conduction of problem-oriented and research interest-focused studies (i.e. investigations not over-determined by disciplinary boundaries[52]) holds significant potential to macerate the perceived boundaries between 'systematic' disciplines and AS. Furthermore, the interplay between socio-spatial metaphors, including networks, scale, anchoring in particular places, etc. (underpinned by positionality), promises to be intriguing and less exclusive towards one approach compared to the other.

Given the particular boundary-enhancing organisation of scholarship in national knowledge orders, members of the Crossroads Asia network will have to reflect more consciously upon on which occasions they interact and learn from/with scholars from the 'systematic' disciplines. A proactive scrutinising of the putative boundaries between AS and disciplinary representatives on such occasions, mutual exchange and awareness-raising for the situatedness of knowledge can serve as a framework for Crossroads members to 'feed' ideas of positionality and reflexivity back more systematically into the discussion. If successful, i.e. convincing in the quest for taking into account socio-spatial relations (positionality and spatialities), a rapprochement between AS and 'systematic' disciplines, even at the institutional level, could be feasible in the longer term. The past two conferences organised by the Crossroads Asia network[53] constituted the first attempts at such a framework. Here, representatives from different AS, several 'systematic' disciplines including political sciences, sociology, anthropology and geography, as well as from other AS centres and networks

[51] The same applies to the existence of trans-local religious spaces which usually escape conventional area frames. For example, the Shia people everywhere – no matter whether in Afghanistan, Kargil/Baltistan, Quetta, etc. – look towards Iran and centres of Shia faith, education and clerics in both Iraq (Najaf) and throughout Iran.

[52] The research interest could of course also centre on the profile of a discipline or the testing of an assumed universal disciplinary concept; likewise, it could be the 'area' or regional focus (Jones/Paasi 2013). Thus, frames of reference are not limited to 'things' like Islamic networks; disciplines like Sociology or Economics; regional units like Zomia, SEA; and 'flow' concepts like figurations or mobility. Moreover, departing from the research interest, no frame of reference can be assumed to be objectively superior to another one. A basic underlying assumption of research and scientific inquiry, however, is that distinctions have to be made (thus the construction of borders/boundaries), in order to make sense of observations and perceptions (Haller 2003: 105), though this is done in a reflective way.

[53] 'Figurations of Mobility', Nov. 22-24, 2012, Humboldt Universität Berlin & 'Mobilising Religion: Networks and Mobility', July 18-19, 2013, University of Bonn.

funded through the same funding line as Crossroads Asia, were invited, presented their work and actively engaged in the discussions. Approaches to 'post'-AS were therefore discussed without a particular regional focus but along themes and in particular along different spatial dimensions (i.e. mobility, positionality, networks, scales, places, etc.) relevant in constructing spaces of everyday relevance to the people in focus.

Ad (c) boundaries within AS and boundaries demarcating different AS

Taking further what has been said for areas in section (a) of this sub-chapter above, the question of borders and boundaries in AS (as locality- or area-making knowledge regimes), but also inherent in them, can be discussed. Detecting trends to rethink "the meaning of space and boundary zones in a trans-national regional context", Hirsch (2013: 109) highlights the dominance of articles on borders and frontiers in area journals from 2009. However, while the 'boundaries between' are more obvious and thus become more commonly challenged, the 'boundaries within' (Jackson 2003) are often underestimated. With regard to AS – and not just areas – this poses several questions, the reflection on which is imperative for members the Crossroads Asia research network.

On the one hand, they refer to the interrelation of German-based researchers with researchers originating from the geographic region […] focused on by the Crossroads paradigm, including the question as to where, how and on which occasions we interact and learn from/with scholars originating from the geographical region the Crossroads network focuses on with its approach? On the other hand, the 'us-them' divide within AS touches upon questions regarding the capacities of local researchers, the (national and/or disciplinary) organisation of research and thus science policy elsewhere, including the nature of the funding structure[54], the use of specific national languages for the generation and proliferation of knowledge, the degree of academic freedom and thus access to international discourses, scientific debates and literatures. A connected question is to what extent are the assumingly different approaches complementary, given the fact that research 'there' is all too often taken up on issues dictated by or subtly generated as a result of Western interests and funding opportunities (see the discussion on SEA Studies, African Studies and East European Studies in 2.3 above)?[55]

The subsequent question would then be what are local concerns, and are they actually taken up? Why are they taken up in some cases, in which, or why not? What is the value and acknowledgement connected to research in local science policies?[56] Connected to this matter is the question regarding how we go about researching 'with' instead of 'about' and 'on' local counterparts? This has been one of the recommendations of the Wissenschaftsrat (2006). The format of research fellows, their interaction with 'local' colleagues during field research, etc. has to be reflected on systematically: what have we gained from these encounters, has it qualified our way of looking at our research topic

[54] A reflection on the possibly underlying agenda of BMBF funding for the Crossroads Asia network, and to what extent members and researchers adopt or reject a utilitarian AS agenda, might be in order as well (see Ch. 6 for a brief response).

[55] In this context Hirsch (2013: 117) speaks of the hegemony of Western social science, which is at the root of much of the imitation and reactive research agendas of local researchers and academic institutions. The apparent large-scale absence of locally generated ideas and alternative models of 'development' in Islamic countries, for example, is a case in point.

[56] Research portfolios might have suffered considerably due to protracted violent conflict in a certain country or a post-conflict situation (Afghanistan, Tajikistan, see Feuer et al. 2013). More commonly and simpler, however, the non-acknowledgement and prominence of social science research throughout many sites in which Crossroads Asia network members work, is plainly a function of the fact that government funding for university research work by locals is not prioritised, and the need for it not clearly defined. In many countries, students typically study to matric, college or university degree level, but they rarely continue in research, rather going to work for the government, business or a company. This means fewer insights from local scholars, if they can be identified at all locally.

and impacted on our approaches/methodology, etc.? Also related: how do we acknowledge knowledge generated by 'local' researchers? And additionally, is there a divide (and if so, what does that mean/how do we deal with this?) between 'data providers' and 'data analysers' in the network's research? Obviously, these questions are again related to the broad theme of 'translation/s' (including linguistic boundaries and translational challenges, not least manifest in publishing languages) and thus how meaningful dialogue (meaningful to 'us' and 'the others') can be established (see 5.1). So far we can say that not only has the number of applications received by colleagues interested in joining the Crossroads Asia network, using our infrastructure and contributing to our discussions increased (with 3 applications in 2011 and 96 applications in 2013), but additionally the intensity of interaction between German researchers and visiting fellows (altogether 10 by end of 2013) has increased immensely. Each stay of a visiting fellow has resulted in a Crossroads Asia working paper, contributing a local perspective to Crossroads Asia's research paradigm. Furthermore, the fellows remain part of Crossroads Asia's extended network, receive our quarterly newsletter, are invited to all Crossroads events and act as additional contacts and resources for Crossroads colleagues in the field.

Ad (d) boundaries between academia, the wider public, policymakers and practitioners

The fourth type of boundary is again more obvious and requires a certain extent of 'translation' between academia, the general public, policymakers and practitioners. The Crossroads Asia network has yet to reflect on how the network has fared regarding the application-oriented output of research, the transfer and sharing of knowledge with the general public, policymakers and media. The numbers of website visits, downloads (here also the video recordings of Crossroads events and interviews on YouTube) as well as attendances at our conferences, workshops and public lectures indicate an interest in our work and that interested people actually find access to our work. Collaborations such as with the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (IfA) further facilitate the transfer of Crossroads Asia's core ideas. Yet, at the same time, some of our plans to stretch the network's reach further than done to this point in time (i.e. an Afghanistan exhibition in the German Bundestag) have not been followed up to the degree that they actually required.

Nonetheless, the boundary question between academia and policymakers, for example, also touches upon science policy issues and interests – again, the question whether the government funding of the Crossroads Asia network's activities (via the BMBF), besides reflecting the convincing scientific quality of its approach, also communicates the specific (possibly strategic) interest and political agenda of the German government in the 'area'. More in general, how 'strategic' is AS (still), given the programmatic AS initiative for revitalisation on the one hand and "employment and support by state-institutions in this particular academic area" on the other hand?[57]

From the discussion in sections (a-d), it follows that when making efforts to rethink areas and the disciplines for AS, we are in fact rethinking geographic just as much as disciplinary and societal spaces of knowledge production.[58] On the question as to how this can be done more systematically and effectively, concepts summarised under the notion of 'boundary work' (i.e. Cash et al. 2003; Mollinga 2008, 2010; Pohl/Hirsch Hadorn 2007) point the way forward. Cash et al., for example, argue that the

[57] Taken from Melber's reflection on African Studies. See Melber (2005: 369).

[58] These are closely related to the questions of 'translation' (linguistic, cultural, cross-disciplinary) and link also to the often (albeit falsely) established dichotomy between fundamental and applied research. For reflections on both dimensions see subsections 5.1 and 5.2 below.

mobilisation of credible, salient and legitimate knowledge in processes facilitated through conscious boundary work, and paying attention to the communication, translation and mediation of this knowledge, can enhance the influence of research on policymaking. Mollinga (2008, 2010), with reference to inter- and transdisciplinary (natural resources-related) research, developed this idea further into what he calls the "boundary-crossing framework." He identifies 'boundary concepts', 'boundary objects' and 'boundary settings' as pillars of effective boundary-crossing and argues that the careful co-ordination of all three elements helps to "rationalize dissent" (2008, p. 22). Referring to Pohl and Hirsch Hadorn (2007), as well as ongoing debates on transdisciplinarity, Mollinga points to systems, targets and transformation knowledge as influencing one another, in order to determine the success of interaction and cooperation at different interfaces and across different boundaries. He then goes on to argue that three types of boundary work are required for successfully informing – in his case natural resources management – with the expertise existing in the sciences, while simultaneously posing a substantial challenge (Mollinga 2010: 8): "(a) analytical work for understanding: the development of boundary concepts; (b) instrumental work for action: the design and construction of boundary objects; and (c) organisational work to facilitate the former two: the shaping of boundary settings."

In developing 'Crossroads Studies' as a research programme, we will have to reflect consciously on our boundary concepts, objects and settings – more than we have done so far. In the passages of text above, we have mentioned our boundary concepts, which thus far are 'conflict', 'migration', 'development' as well as 'mobility' and 'figuration', and increasingly also 'mobilisation processes', 'borders/boundaries/frontiers', 'interaction' and 'communication'. Our boundary objects, the instrumental work for improved boundary crossing (between AS and 'systematic' disciplines just as much as between Crossroads researchers and 'local' researchers), have been (especially for the former) our conferences, workshops, public lectures, publication projects and the abovementioned 'outreach activities' (i.e. YouTube clips), as well as (especially for the later boundary) our working paper series and our fellowship programme. And lastly, our boundary settings have been the structures in which we work: the BMBF funding line 'Area Studies', the cooperation arrangement between seven university institutes spread throughout Germany, their internal and external institutional environments, our Crossroads Asia network internal structures, including our working groups, the executive and advisory boards and their interactions with the project team, the network coordinator and the network coordinating office, etc.
Yet, how these boundary concepts, objects and settings have determined the type of Crossroads studies that we have conducted in the past two and half years, and how they have determined the definition of 'Crossroads studies' (content and organisational-wise), will still have to be reflected on more consciously. This is a first step. What do we learn from it for the second phase?

4.2 Methodological and epistemological considerations

The subsequent elaborations present selective issues in a more or less telegraphic-style overview. However, it is hoped that they provide some food for thought for further reflection on and among Crossroads Asia network members and other Areanists engaging in the debate. The section's framing as a presentation of methodological and epistemological considerations does not imply neglecting conceptual factors, given that they determine a large part of the interface between epistemology and methodology. As a rule, the latter depends on the former and on particular analytical concepts.

4.2.1 On methodology

Inductive methods and empirical field research (enabled by the knowledge of local language/s) can be considered an asset for AS, as they rely on fieldwork as the principal research method. This poses challenges regarding the above elaborated 'quest for comparison' as a method assumed to generate 'better' insights.

CHALLENGES FOR COMPARATIVE RESEARCH AND SUBSEQUENT THEORY-BUILDING

Benedict Anderson, in 1978, listed a number of challenges for AS in conducting comparative research: language difficulties, data difficulties, access difficulties, cultural difficulties, political difficulties, etc. (Anderson 1978: 232, quoted after Jackson 2003a: 83). These have not lessened over time or with the training of AS specialists or Disciplinarians. Thus, a strong contrast and gap exists between ideas of knowledge generation via comparison for theory-building on the one hand and the complexity, diversity and multiplicity with which the empirical world is endowed – and which rather than aim at entangling, requires understanding its 'functioning' in embeddedness and relationships – on the other hand. As a consequence, Jackson (2003a: 80) calls for a respective nuancing and differentiation of the conceptual frameworks we employ to understand local phenomena. Needless to say, these frameworks cannot be limited by disciplinary constraints. With regard to comparison, ex-post comparison (see the elaborations on the 'quest for comparison' above in Ch. 2.4) therefore seems one of the few feasible ways out. This said, one is reminded once again of the idea that basically also all methodological frames of reference are matters of convenience and artifice (Thompson 2013: 295), though their disciplinary determination is still perceptible, strongest in preferences[59] regarding the design, validity and/or representativeness of a conducted research.

CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH LONG-TERM EMPIRICAL FIELDWORK

AS has preserved field work as a productive technology. While field research is always place-based, it can be carried out at several locations in sequence, with the option of revisiting each and following up on the developments in one particular site. Furthermore, given the usual relative long duration spent in the field, field work practices enable rather transformative experiences and insights, in contrast to just 'added' ones which, for example, a journalist, a simple surveyor (for opinion polls) or a quantitatively-focused researcher who implements a questionnaire might derive and 'take out'.

A paradigm which has recently risen to prominence is field-based action research based on the premise of 'creating' knowledge in mutual interaction with the field and its residents, for example.[60] It is not envisaged to serve the testing or discovering of some pre-conceived concepts and theoretical ideas. This is in obvious contrast to Macdonald's (2004) position described above. While Macdonald is of the opinion that a "science of culture is not [and cannot be] the product of culture," (ibid.: 4)[61] the field-based action research paradigm would rather bear out on behalf of Houben's position (see above) that something different can actually emerge through co-production in the field via the

[59] The admittedly too generalised assumption (prejudice?) is that geographers look for spatial scale analysis, sociologists distinguish between macro, meso and micro analyses and elsewhere analytical frameworks are discussed along the lines of methodological individualism vs. nationalism.
[60] Also discussed as part of ongoing transdisciplinarity debates, see Ul-Hassan et al. (2011) as an example for a 'Follow the…' method.
[61] Of course, the usage of the concept of 'culture' would have to be scrutinised in this quote.

interaction of the researcher and the local context (including its people, landscape, etc.).[62] In this sense the field can be seen rather as a place of encounter, albeit not with 'the other' but with the non-conceptualised. On another note, this perspective resembles an opportunity for locating 'the field' in any location, thereby complying with the idea that 'exoticism' can be everywhere, even on the next floor of the university building in which we are working.

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS DEPENDING ON CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Epistemological assumptions as well as conceptual frameworks of reference also inform methods used for data analysis. It is here that the dichotomy between disciplines and AS becomes completely invalid, given that grounded theory, content analysis, discourse analysis, etc. are established methodologies of qualitative social science research work. No discipline can claim to own them or to have the exclusive right to make use of them today. The same holds true for text analysis in the broadest sense.[63] Consider, for example, Iranian Studies, which were traditionally limited to text analyses against the backdrop of different disciplinary frames of inquiry, e.g. historical-critical readings of sources, or linguistic approaches.[64]

4.2.2 On epistemology

There are four remarks to make on epistemology[65], which are subsequently summarised as questions:

- *How do we know what we know?*
  What are our sources? Do we use particular/special methods to access these sources and to analyse them? How do we 'translate' our empirical insights into 'scientific' language and feed them back in to academia first, elsewhere second?
- *What are the categories we employ, if any?*
  For rethinking AS, researchers do not employ container categories but seek socio-spatial scales above and below nation states, for example by focusing on 'the global' (Global Studies), or employ alternative social scales by differentiating, for example societies, as elaborated in the conceptual paper of the Conflict Working Group (Boedeker et al. 2012). Additionally, what type of spatiality (Leitner et al. 2008) do we live ourselves in the network (conducting our research in concrete places (in the field and in our home institutions), linked through a network, characterised by high mobility (in/out of the field/conference etc. trips), positioning ourselves against other disciplines, to other topics/approaches, to for example the spatial category 'territory', and at the same time trying to be present in the minds of people (colleagues, returned Crossroads Fellows, civil servants that we hope will grant us the next visum) in Germany just as much as in Dushanbe, Karachi or Alberta (Canada), irrespective of their location, but respective of their link with us and the Crossroads idea?
- *How can we transcend/break out of a Western-centric social science knowledge order?*

[62] This approach challenges the idea of having ethical consent forms signed by anybody who is part of this type of knowledge generation through long-term interaction (where to start, who to include and whom not – being there vs. extracting information from preliminary identified 'informants').

[63] 'In the broadest sense' here refers to the disciplines called 'Textwissenschaften' in German and acknowledges the fact that textual and content analysis methods also apply to interview texts derived from transcriptions of fieldwork data.

[64] Meanwhile, a branch called Persianate Studies has evolved in the US (Borjian 2009). It is more focused on the geographical, societal and religious dimensions of inhabitants of the Persian-speaking 'world'.

[65] Given that all four aspects have methodological consequences, sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 cannot be discussed separately from each other.

Two ideas come to mind. First, we might need to decide to transform our understanding of new knowledge (what do we hold valid as knowledge? Whose knowledge?) and thus research as well. This scrutinises the hegemonic position of Western social science discourse and its epistemological bases. Given what has been said above, that with the consideration of positionality the idea of universal knowledge is rendered invalid and that it is rather about the situatedness of knowledge and its production, epistemological assumptions fray and we could expect their multiplication, because they would have to take account of and reflect the situatedness of knowledge production. Second, it seems of utmost necessity to better acknowledge the existence of other, i.e. non-Western, countries', societies', agents', knowledge-seekers' and knowledge-generators' views on 'things' – areas, AS, research and knowledge generation in general. An investigation into 'others' views' on our research topics, on the concerned 'areas' and approaches, and into 'their' perspectives might be in order (see boundary discussion section – ad (c) – above). One way to proceed in this direction is the active seeking of partnering and working with partners, to qualify our own perspectives and build a critical dialogue "between world pictures and world images," as Appadurai (2000: 8) has suggested. Mutual learning processes through joint research programmes could be a first step in forming new and more inclusive epistemic communities which would then – in the long term – hold the potential to transform Western views on valid research questions, knowledge and so on. Nonetheless, given what has been discussed above (section c on boundaries), i.e. the sometimes non-existent capacities of local researchers and academic institutions and a related lack of interest formulation or proactive exploration of (more indigenous) locally relevant research, the question arises as to whether serious collaboration and exchange can actually be realised on an equal partnership basis. Moreover, is an easy harmonisation of epistemological differences even realistic?

- *How do we discuss our own biases, the frameworks we have in mind and which guide us (even unconsciously) in practical research?*
  The above discussed view of Macdonald (see 4.1.2), whereby every empirical observation is theory-laden, can be countered with Sayer's viewpoint that this does not imply that the research is necessarily determined by the concepts and theories one might have been trained or otherwise socialised in (Sayer 2010: 83). One interesting question is whether the conceptual biases will be reduced once a new generation of researchers, who were trained as Areanists in recently newly established study programmes throughout Germany, takes off for 'the field'. Nobody can escape own 'cultural' biases, which do not need to be learned at higher education institutions but with which one is more or less 'born'. However, there are methodological tools (and it is part of research ethics of social sciences) to counter and reflect on one's biases as ably as possible, in order to pre-empt their impact on data collection and knowledge generation.

4.2.3 Further (related) considerations

Finally, four other points are worth noting in this discussion:

- Related to the last point made in 4.2.2, i.e. concerning research ethics 'as we know it' and as we have been trained in: the criteria for 'good science' are sufficiently known, among which are falsifiability, replicability, sytematicity and reflexivity.
- Related to the previous bullet point, critical voices have argued that especially in the social sciences there is an issue with the enforcement of replicability (Appadurai 2000). While it

paves the ground for ideal, so-called value-free research, this paradigm can also be accused of depriving researchers of the possibility to integrate moral and normative dimensions into their research from the very design stage. This is controversially challenged by others, who argue that research should take an explicit normative stance. Relating to our work, and in AS more in general, where researchers deal with 'different' societies and social and spatial units, the question that arises is whose norms/normativity are we supposed to follow, if any? Given that normativity is rather problematic, as it can always be scrutinised, would it be wiser then to suffice to the paradigm of value-free research? Are values the same as norms and moral responsibility? Given the considerations on reflexivity and positionality, do we refuse to mirror findings through a 'moral' or 'normative' frame when it comes to 'translating' out insights to our own society/knowledge order?[66] How do we position ourselves in this discussion?

The following two points still have to be discussed among network members:

- What are our experiences of visiting AS and (inter-)disciplinary workshops and conferences? Do we feel truly represented by the topics and discourses offered, or is it not sometimes the feeling of being an 'outsider', a 'bird of paradise', when one encounters such events and is ultimately challenged to find a common language or to talk across disciplines and areas etc? How strong is the habitus Areanists or Disciplinarians carry? How does it manifest itself?
- Finally, AS, disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies not only comprise research as a practice, but also teaching, dissemination of knowledge, networking, institution-building through the creation of journals, organisation of conferences/workshops, the institutionalisation of professorships, departments and chairs thereof, as well as funding lines and organisations. Where does the Crossroads network see scope to tap into institutionalisation (keyword: *Verstetigung*)?

5. Excursus: applied research on and in a container

Besides the individual work packages almost all network members implement for their research, plus a number of synthesising discussions and publications, many of us are consulted by different kinds of institutions (political offices, foundations, NGOS, aid agencies, media, etc.) to either advise them on policies with regard to container entities (e.g. situations in a specific country or conflict zone) or to comment on contemporary developments. This type of quest for opinions and the results of applied research enjoy unabated demand and relevance outside academia.[67] By outsiders we are often ascribed a status as 'experts' for a specific country or region, no matter our own identity prescription.

This said, some selective reflections on a few of the points unfolded above (Ch. 4.1) will be briefly summarised here with the example of research on and in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is only taken as an example, and it could be substituted with any 'country container' which is currently enjoying

[66] It is important to differentiate morally or, better, pro social justice-engaged research (e.g. carried out by a scholarly activist via action research) from forms of '*Kulturrelativismus*' on the one hand and aimed-for universal normative values as frame/s of scientific inference on the other hand.

[67] The likely reasons being that others attach superior meaning to 'containers', even if for erroneous reasons, possibly. We/the general public – as contemporary citizens of a country – are socialised to think in political maps, to digest information according to country categories and thus to request country expertise (we might want to buy a book on Pakistan to develop a better understanding of it). It is enshrined in our education and knowledge order system how an ordinary person perceives the world around him/her and in which categories he/she thinks.

similar attention from policymakers or just on the 'failed states' agenda (e.g. Somalia, Tajikistan, Syria). This thought experiment ought to stimulate opinions about research relevance and the task/expectations assigned to Areanists (and their capacities to respond adequately) in the overall make-up of scientific inquiry and reasoning.

As mentioned already, Afghanistan is a container which includes diverse peoples differentiated by social boundaries and language and who interact through manifold networks of exchange. Trade and other flows (movement of people, ideas, messages, goods, discourses, etc.) make Afghanistan the epitome of detected mobility and counter-tendencies of, at times, the situational immobility so characteristic of the entire geographical region covered by the Crossroads Asia research paradigm. It has been mentioned likewise already that Afghanistan has escaped a fixed attribution to one of the established 'areas' in institutionalised AS. 'Afghanistan Studies' have no tradition in the Western AS[68], although in Russia, the former Soviet Union and the GDR curricula for *Afganistika* (MGIMO/U in Moscow) and 'Afghanistik' (HU Berlin) have been created.

Today, Afghanistan is studied in a number of different contexts – as an 'intervention society' (Bonacker/Daxner et al. 2010), in the framework of the CRC 'Governance in areas of limited statehood' (FU Berlin)[69] and with different research interests by members of the Crossroads Asia network. The extent of 'containerism' with which Afghanistan is looked at decreases with each of the mentioned examples in the sequence from first to last. If we are asked for policy advice, it is – depending of course on the commissioning client on the one hand and the expertise they might connect with the person requested on the other hand – often about background information. A political sociologist might be asked to conduct conflict analyses of particular provinces and the main target areas of German engagement, to compile a country analysis as the background to some kind of comparative index (e.g. Bertelsmann Transformation Index), context analyses (cultural political background) on some particular region (Southeast, Northeast, Central) or a paper on resource politics taking the example of different contested natural resource categories. Where the delivered insights end up and how they are used, how they are contextualised and who paraphrased them or even plagiarises ideas for project proposals, publications etc. is usually out of our control.

5.1 Issues of translation/s

Given the boundaries and boundary work discussed above, the example herein highlights the question as to whether we 'Areanists', or so-perceived country experts, are and should suffice to be only in charge of context variables – and that 'others' (Disciplinarians, policymakers, etc.) thus will take over the 'translation' of context data into higher order forms, namely the generation of science-based policies etc. Indeed, the impression so far is that the answer to this question is in the affirmative; in some instances (or most of the time?) we will have to suffice to deliver only part of the whole story (analysis). As mentioned in the last sentence of the previous paragraph, this is highly unsatisfactory. Against the background of the AS debate outlined in this paper, this highlights the problem that possibly our expertise as 'Areanists' (having the language and cultural competences anyways), even with sound disciplinary training, is limited in regard to providing answers to the many questions in which other institutions, organisations, individuals and companies might be interested. For example, if asked to provide analytical insights regarding different aspects of Afghan rural society for an evaluation of the impacts of aid projects in the country or some specific location by a certain

[68] Rich disciplinary research, mainly by anthropologists of Western nationalities, was conducted in Afghanistan throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in line with disciplinary interests and 'fashions' of the time and are mostly descriptive.
[69] See: http://www.sfb-governance.de/en/

donor, we would have to admit that we are (probably as a rule) not impact analysis and evaluation specialists. The latter comprise a body of expertise acquired through training that cannot be expected from an 'Areanist'. Thus, the example demonstrates that especially outside academia (here we limit our heuristic interests usually to ourselves, though this can be critical as well, see above), we need other 'experts' and people from different fields of knowledge to evaluate various aspects of the insights we can deliver against the institutional and heuristic background for which the knowledge has been requested and to which it is relevant.

Put differently, it can be concluded that given the complexity of the issues and processes of which the world and selective aspects thereof are comprised, it does not mean a loss of face or humiliation if Areanists acknowledge that once taken-for-granted dichotomies (AS vs. disciplines) and the claim for the sole right to interpret specific phenomena bound in an 'area' have been rendered meaningless and redundant. The ideal of the polymath knowledge ('*Universalgelehrtentum*') based in one person or a guild (of Areanists/Disciplinarians) is merely an illusion in today's highly differentiated world and the challenges it is confronted with and which are tackled by various likewise highly specialised experts in different fields of expertise.

For academia, however, there are at least three more points to make regarding issues of translation/s[70]:

- The first concerns the translation and bridging of concepts connected to the cultural differences between the researcher and the researched. One way forward might be the search for and subsequent identification of joint/common analytical categories. Especially in political science and sociology, the need to adjust existing concepts to explain social phenomena has been recognised strongly – take for example categories like 'state', 'authority', 'power' and 'order'. This is one promising avenue for AS to benefit from and feed into disciplinary discussions on these concepts, especially given the over-determination of Western political science and sociology through the thinking of a few individuals, for example Max Weber. This is not a quest to abolish the already mentioned categories completely, but rather an attempt to raise awareness of their contextual situatedness. Thus, in many instances when representatives of AS and 'systematic' disciplines interact, the usage and exact definition of etic categories might enable participants from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to engage in a debate on specific emic understandings of these concepts.
- The second – related to the first – is a reflection on the question of who can represent whom in the processes of knowledge production. Can external researchers validly draw conclusions from observations against different cultural, linguistic, political, etc. backgrounds? This touches upon the debate around native vs. non-native scholars and the qualification of non-native scholars and criteria, i.e. when they are eligible to interpret studies of societies and/or phenomena. For example, the difficulties of some of the initially invited Crossroads fellows to engage with the paradigms employed by the Crossroads Asia research network bears several

[70] It should be mentioned here that an overemphasis on translation between two 'somethings' will feed into dichotomous thinking with regard to language use and cultural differences. However, on a different level, translation requirements and issues might be reflected upon where communication is rendered difficult because of one party's non-acknowledgement of the second party's assumptions, thus creating major epistemological problems. This seems most pronounced in faith-related research endeavours, e.g. the research on Sufi shrines presented to devotees of Wahhabism, or when faith-related questions are discussed between believers and unbelievers (Krämer 2013).

questions regarding translation.[71] Either the knowledge-seeking paradigms along which Crossroads Asia works are incomprehensible to scholars originating in the connected geographical region, because they are either misfits or the training of the fellows does not allow them to leave learned fixed forms of scientific concepts and inquiry behind, or we are not open enough to engage with the scholarship of others unless it is talking to us by using known categories. Deep, ongoing reflection and the scrutinising of such interactions when they happen might help to disentangle this conundrum. In addition, this point touches upon the precondition of being a 'good Areanist', i.e. the minimum requirement of possessing good mastery of at least one local language based on the lived experience among native speakers of the language in their locale. According to Chou (2006: 133), the intimate knowledge of a place […] and its people are indispensable for "meaningful comparison, conceptual innovation, and theoretical sophistication."

- The third point concerns the usage and choice of language itself. The dominance of English as a publishing language seems to foster the hegemony of Western social science concepts, especially if we consider that within Europe alone we have the experience that distinct languages have produced different ways of thinking and thus led to various kinds and ways of knowledge production and dissemination. Thus, a parallel publishing also in local languages, the purposeful publishing for audiences and forums where the people we write/research about are able to access and digest our research and comment thereon, should be given more attention. This way feedback loops could be established and better inform the existing scholarly debate. In the long run this might possibly even bridge the West vs. Rest production modus of knowledge. According to Jackson (2003a: 70), "empirical research conducted in local languages and sensitive to local discursive structures is central to rethinking ways to study difference between as well as to developing an epistemological base from which to resist the homogenizing accounts of globalisation."

5.2 Fundamental vs. applied research?

The above elaborations on carrying out research in container categories, in order to inform policymaking etc., refers also to the manifestation of an often-perceived gap between academic – read fundamental – and applied – i.e. supposedly policy relevant – research. The assumption is that academic research is privileged in the fact that it is neither guided not limited by political or other non-academic interests. In contrast, policy-related endeavours are more or less guided by political interests and limited by them. However, as has been discussed already with relevance to Islamic Studies in the 1970s (Rodinson 2007), it does not make sense to play both off against each other. Equally, the value of each element can be measured only according to internal criteria of academic research and policy-related research, respectively. Yet, common criteria for valuation are largely absent.

Interestingly, also, the fashion of the time has it that applied research can be more easily justified for funding. The explicit demands for applied research in the BMBF call of the AS funding line as well as the EU-funding calls for Africa (Bayart 2003: 413) are cases in point. However, there is no applied

[71] For example, a conference participant and presenter at the Crossroads Asia 'Mobilising Religion' conference claimed she is better able to understand topics, their relevance and to 'translate' for example the experienced challenges of migrants at their destination. However, is it not often a matter of possessing the conceptual tools and methodologies, in order to make sense and establish meaning based on observations and (reported or self-made) experiences? The discussion moves between two extreme poles: the one insisting on cultural traits not accessible to outsiders ('cultural fundamentalism') and the other entertaining extreme cultural relativism (see above).

without fundamental research that is internationally competitive and recognised. It seems that maybe we researchers have to learn to argue smarter, for example more along the lines that theoretical insights are needed to solve real-world problems of the day. Funding cannot just one-sidedly support applied research.

The picture and dividing line between fundamental and applied research activities is also not so clear-cut. As an Areanist one could argue that even though in applied research and policy advice we might first of all be perceived to deliver context variables, knowledge about historical path dependencies (time) and place/space-based evidences, the systematic approach to understanding the meaning generated by individual views on just context variables usually does not reveal itself to 'others', e.g. politicians or evaluations experts, on first or second sight of the data. Can we claim that this is even not possible and will not happen anyways (given the degree of specialisation of 'the others', time constraints, professional interests etc.), thus reconfirming our role as Areanists having the local/cultural etc. expertise?

Moreover, in all modesty, Areanists should be ready to acknowledge that no single expert can respond to all kinds of requests and deliver all types of context variables. Individual Areanists can contribute selective 'bulletproof' details, but for many questions confronted by us it will be necessary to consult colleagues and synthesise.

6. The way forward: from spatial containers to social interactions and differentiated spatialities

Crossroads Asia, as a research paradigm, distances itself from conventional 'area' conceptions (i.e. Central or South Asia as spatial containers) and instead studies the interdependent flows of people, goods and ideas. So far, we have achieved this with the thematic foci of conflict, migration and development, each studied and discussed through the lenses of mobility, networks and figurations (Elias). Yet, after two and a half years of empirical research, the three original thematic foci have moved to the background, while issues of social/geographic mobilities, mobilisation processes, the negotiation of political borders, socio-cultural/ethnic boundaries and historical frontiers, studied through the lens and on the empirical level of individual and collective processes of interaction and their role in constructing space, are increasingly moving toward the centre of our attention. Norbert Elias' figurational sociology has proven useful in underlining the interdependent character of various mobilities; nonetheless, it also became clear that it is only one conceptual tool amongst many that are useful in pushing our analyses further. Studies on mobilities and networks are increasingly linked with approaches to the multidimensionality of space (Leitner et al., Jessop, etc.), and while we continue to distance ourselves from territory as defining bases for 'areas', the layered nature of the spaces of relevance in the everyday lives of the people we are interested in, moves into the foreground. We thus include the spatial dimensions of place, scale and positionality in our analyses and ask how different geographic, social and disciplinary spaces are constructed in and through communication in processes of interaction with those who we study, just as much as ourselves. This is also where we move from emphasising the dynamic, the processual, the constructedness of space (through mobilities, just as much as through the fluidities of communication) to the study of the opposite, the static, the borders and boundaries, their strengthening and weakening through human action and their role in nurturing or hindering the dynamic (i.e. mobilities etc.). And while this dichotomy helps to order our thoughts and further encourages the debate, we very much take into

account that it is sometimes especially the borders and boundaries that facilitate mobility (or do not), result in the mobilising of people and ideas and vice versa, while at the same time practices that at first sight can be regarded as especially mobile (i.e. cross-border trade), in fact include many aspects of 'the static' (i.e. socio-cultural boundary production to assure a privileged position in cross-border activities).

The paper and 'living document' presented herein captures an ongoing discussion process and hopes to act as a 'boundary object' for facilitating this discussion process further – within the network of Crossroads Asia, as well as with other (BMBF-funded or not) AS networks and centres and with those representatives of the 'systematic' disciplines interested in rethinking the (constructed) divide between the former and the latter. The aim of this discussion is to contribute to a rethinking of current AS approaches and to take a first step in living and enacting a different approach – of AS just as much as of (still far too often Euro- or Western-centric) 'systematic' disciplines. We speak of 'Crossroads Studies': a research programme with the clear interest in studying people, goods and ideas on the move, and who identify themselves with languages, ethnicities, cultures, politics and histories that originally (exaggerating: in former times) were thought to be found in what was then called 'Central' and 'South' Asia. While this thematic interest is clear, Crossroads Studies is (thought to become) a research programme, meaning a set of thematic foci, a methodological and conceptual toolkit, as well as a space for further development by its contributors. Just as we distance ourselves from the idea of 'area' being a geographical space, demarcated by a clearly defining line along its edges and a set of characteristics to be found on the inside, we do not aim at a clearly defined, static concept of Crossroads Studies but instead at a research programme defined by those who live it.

To arrive at this stage of 'Crossroads Studies', the discussion initiated herein will have to take another few rounds of:

- Systematic analysis and joint discussion of Crossroads Asia's research findings from the first phase, as well as the boundaries to be crossed (see section 4.1);
- Entering into a systematic reflection on the findings and concepts put forth by other forms of AS;
- Engaging with neighbouring disciplines, i.e. not exclusively Western geography, sociology, political sciences;
- Conducting 'Crossroads Studies' in other regions;
- Formulating explicit science policy advice – for science policy decision-makers as well as science-funding institutions (national as well as international);
- […]

With this in mind, we thank all readers and those discussing the matter for joining this process, and we are looking forward to receiving your remarks, criticisms and suggestions!

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Appendices

A1 – Overview of BMBF-funded AS research networks and centres

(Compiled by Nelli Nokkala; last updated November 21, 2013)

PROJECTS	Duration	Title (in German)	Concepts/Approach	Homepage
Uni Leipzig	1.10.2009-2014	Auf- und Ausbau eines Centre for Area Studies	- Central theme "Cultural Encounters and Political Orders in a Global Age" - Concentrates on questions of how global flows of people, ideas, goods and capital affect the existence and perception of different world regions, as well as to what extent the world is both de-territorialised and re-territorialised through the interwoven processes of globalisation; with nine different research fields: o Research Field 1: The Relationship between Economies of Violence and Attempts to Establish New Forms of Order o Research Field 2: Processes of Cultural Transfers within and between World Regions o Research Field 3: Circulation and Adaptation of Elements of Mass and Popular Cultures o Research Field 4: Migration and Legal Transfer amongst Converging World Regions o Research Field 5: Commodity Chains and Socio-economic Connections between World Regions o Research Field 6: New Regionalism, Macro-regional Integration and International Organisations as Places of a Global Synthesis of Culture o Research Field 7: Technologies and Significations in the Production of Order and Disorder o Research Field 8: Critical Junctures in the History of Globalisation o Research Field 9: Self-Reflexive Area Studies: The Consequences of the Spatial Turn for Disciplines Concerned with the Study of World Regions	http://www.uni-leipzig.de/cas/

Uni Freiburg	1.11.2009-31.10.2013	Grounding Area Studies in Social Practice/ Südostasienforschung	- Interdisciplinary approach (political science, social & cultural anthropology, economics, Asian history) to the study of Southeast Asia by conceptualising area studies as relational and pursuing transculturally-oriented research beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism - Research focus lies in everyday social practice in its complex plurality and sociocultural diversity, connected to cultural transfer and localisation processes - Rather than primarily relying on techniques of discourse analysis, Area Studies on Southeast Asia in Freiburg attaches great importance to empirical research based on extensive field work - While essentially pursuing a constructivist research agenda, it seeks to combine reflectivist approaches with rationalist theoretical arguments - This implies methodological pluralism seeking a convergence of methodologies derived both from hermeneutic and deductive-nomothetic epistemologies. - The *mandala* concept of Southeast Asian Studies at Freiburg is designed as a programme composed of concentric circles radiating from an interdisciplinary and internationalised research and teaching programme	http://www.southeastasianstudies.uni-freiburg.de/
Uni Bochum	1.01.2010-31.12.2013	Einrichtung des Zentrums für Mittelmeerstudien	- Dedicated to the epoch-spanning research of the multi-layered contact zone of the Mediterranean sea between Africa, Asia and Europe in social sciences and humanities (in some fields also natural sciences and archeology) - Research foci are resources, connectivity and trans-locality in the Mediterranean space as well as historic approach to networks, interrelations and conflicts, boundaries between Mediterranean actors; four research fields o Research Group 1: People on the Move - Migration as a Regional Resource o Research Group 2: Social Networks – Corpora of Knowledge and Trans-Mediterrean Contacts o Research Group 3: Intercultural Communication - Pragma and Dogma o Research area 4: Dynamisierungen im Mittelmeerraum – Herrschaft, Wissen, Netzwerke (only German title)	http://www.zms.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/forschung/index.html.en
Uni Bayreuth	01.10.2012-30.09.2016	Zukunft Afrika: Visionen im Umbruch	- Carried out by Bayreuth Academy for Advanced African Studies; research focus are perspectives on the future in Africa and African diaspora; carried out by six working groups (to be convening in 2013 and 2015/2016) and within five sub-projects	http://www.bayreuth-academy.uni-bayreuth.de/de/index.php (HP under construction)

			o Beyond Europe: Narratives of the Future in Modern African History o Visions of Nature: Concepts of Appropriating and Conserving Nature in Africa o Middle Classes on the Rise. Concepts of the future among freedom, consumption, tradition, and moral o Concepts of Future in MediaSpaces o Revolution 3.0: Iconographies of social utopia in Africa and its diasporas	
Uni Marburg	1.02.2013-31.01.2017	Centrum für Nahost- und Mitteloststudien (CNMS): Re-Konfigurationen. Geschichte, Erinnerung und Transformationsprozesse	- CNMS: Orient studies (=classic regional studies: cultural disciplines & languages as well as politics and economics of the Mideast) - Project: Focus on transformation processes in the Mideast & North Africa; Arabellion as challenge for research; discourse analysis; historical narratives	http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms
Uni Frankfurt	1.02.2013-31.01.2017	Afrikas Asiatische Optionen (AFRASO)	- based on the premise that regional studies in a globalised world are increasingly confronted with processes of deterritorialisation and transregionalisation - focus on new African-Asian interactions and is based on the assumption that these interactions – on the economic, political, social, and cultural level – are not only opening up new opportunities for Asian countries, but also for their African counterparts - based on empirical case studies, these findings can then be utilised for a transregional perspective and an innovative approach to Area Studies - 20 projects in four key areas Platform A: New Cooperation – New Dependencies? o Key Area 1: Markets on the Move o Key Area 2: Transnational Civic Networks Platform B: New Development Concepts – New Transregional Spaces? o Key Area 3: Culture as Mode of Development Policies o Key Area 4: Transregional Constructions of Space	http://www.afraso.org/
Uni Bielefeld	1.02.2013-31.01.2017	Die Amerikas als Verflechtungsraum: Transnationale Flows, geopolitische Imaginieren, gesellschaftliche Produktion von Umwelt	- Regional focus on the border between USA and Mexico, which paradoxically stands for both the territorial partitioning and merging of the north and the south - Research focus on entangling phenomena within the society, culture, politics, law, environment and economy of the Americas (Americas as Space of Entanglement(s)) - asymmetric interdependence between the north and the south leads to the	http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/cias/entangled_americas/

			fact that entanglement needs to be examined not only in its integration dynamics but also in its potential for conflict and the regional, national or (trans)local strategies for resistance - no one research concept: broad spectrum of discourse analytical approaches from the departments of history and cultural studies, systematic descriptions from political science and law as well as system ecology, ethno-methodological surveys of daily experiences from social anthropology, qualitative and quantitative approaches from linguistics and media studies - all working together on a mutual research topic, and reflections on the methods and theories taking into account difference theoretical discourses such as gender, race, class and age - three foci o Transnational Flows o Geopolitical Imaginaries o Societal Production of Environment	
Uni Duisburg	1.04.2013-31.03.2017	IN-EAST School of Advanced Studies	- both research and education on contemporary East Asia, focusing on the economies, politics, and societies of China and Japan. - eight chairs, rooted in the faculties of Business Administration, Social Sciences and the Humanities, are involved; with now four, future six research groups o Urban Systems in East Asia o Political Innovations in East Asian Cities o Innovation in Chinese policy processes: Cities in the development of low-carbon strategies. Sub-national innovation and national policy o Behavioral Economics and East Asia	http://www.uni-due.de/in-east/215/
Uni Göttingen	1.04.2013-31.03.2017	The CeMIS- CeMEAS Transregional Research Network (CENTREN)- Netwerk für transregionale Forschung in Indien, China und weiteren Weltregionen	- production of innovative "place-based" knowledge in the social sciences and humanities - It will do so guided by a thematic rubric, "The Politics of the New," which engages one of the most enduring presumptions of modernity: the belief that every moment is characterised by unprecedented social flux and churning, and that every generation bears witness to the emergence of a new world - We will examine how these various ideas and practices of "the new" converge and diverge from each other, both within and across time and space, and what forms of politics and personhood are inaugurated and excluded by calls to newness. In this project we will also pay attention to the various forms of resistance against the “new”.	http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/422555.html

COMPETENCE NETWORKS	Duration	Concepts/ Approach	Homepage
Kompetenznetz: Interdependente Ungleichheitsforschung in Lateinamerika/ FU Berlin, Stift. Preußischer Kulturbesitz	1.12.2009- 30.11.2013	- It addresses the phenomena of social inequalities (socio-economic, socio-political and socio-ecological) that are embedded in transregional social configurations and that need to be analysed within theoretical and methodological frameworks going beyond the nation state with a regional focus on Latin America - As well as one cross-cutting research topic on theory and methodology o research will focus on new temporal configurations of social inequalities and on new spatial configurations, the aim is to systematise translocal and transregional entanglements in the field of social inequalities o methodologically the aim is developing new research designs and approaches for analysing transregional flows and connections that shape local phenomena of social inequality in Latin America such as multi-sited research, comparative research, or global ethnography - Combination of structure and power-oriented approaches as well as knowledge- and culture-oriented approaches in order to overcome dualism of structure and agency. - The current Latin American debates focus on (1) the phenomenon of ongoing persistence and even accentuation of socio-economic inequalities despite a general economic growth; (2) a shift from a purely economic understanding of social inequality towards one that acknowledges the multiple forms of power asymmetry by integrating non-economic dimensions of social inequality, such as culture, ethnicity, "race", and gender; (3) the link between the question of social inequality and the growing relevance of environmental issues for social inequalities at a global level. desiguALdades.net aims at connecting these different research lines within a comprehensive research design on interdependent social inequalities in Latin America - goal to promote a transatlantic dialogue between Latin American research and German/European research in inequality theory, which are only sparsely by German/European discourse	http://www.desigualdades.net/

Kompetenznetz: Regieren in China/ Uni Würzburg, Uni Tübingen, Uni Duisburg, GIGA, Uni Trier	1.03.2010-28.02.2014	- interdiscplinarity of Chinese studies and political science - The objective of the "Governance in China" research network is to explore the preconditions for – as well as the successes and limitations of – institutional adaptability and innovation, together with the methods and content of governance in China. The network's aim is to strengthen the links between political science oriented China studies in Germany, to train a new generation of China scholars with a sound social science background, and to increase Germany's visibility within the international scientific community as a research location; in four topics o Local Cadres as Strategic Groups o China's Policymaking Process: Industrial and Technology Policy o Social Stratification and Political Culture in Contemporary Urban China o Ideological Change and Regime Legitimacy in China	http://www.regiereninchina.de/
Kompetenznetz: Lateinamerika/ Uni Köln, Uni Bielefeld, Uni Hannover, Uni Münster, Uni Bonn	1.02.2010-31.01.2014	- in interdisciplinary project collaboration, humanists, regional and social scientists use the concepts of ethnicity, citizenship and belonging to describe the historically specific and context-dependent forms of symbolic boundaries, ideas of order and belonging in various regions of Latin America scientifically - The analytical content of the concepts (key terms) of ethnicity, citizenship and belonging result from its meaning in the everyday life of actors. We also understand the analysed ideas of delimitation and belonging as communicatively conveyed, putting interactions, negotiation processes, media and discourses in a complex interrelationship with social structures - five sub-projects o Sub-project Bielefeld: Ethnicity, Citizenship and Belonging in the political communication o Sub-project Bonn: The importance of space o Sub-project Cologne: Interdependencies of social categorisations o Sub-project Hanover: Ethnicity, citizenship and belonging and their interaction with other categories of differentiation o Sub-project Münster: Ethnic differentiation in the Mexican nation-building process	http://www.kompetenzla.uni-koeln.de/

Kompetenznetz: Osteuropaforschung/ Uni München, Uni Münster, SWP, Hamburgerisches WeltWirtschaftsInstitut gemeinnützige GmbH, Frankfurt School of Finance & Management, Uni Köln, Uni Hohenheim	1.01.2010-31.12.2013	- focus on successor states of the USSR - the network is envisaged to contribute to renewing East European area studies in Germany as a field where different disciplines engage in productive scholarly exchanges, focusing on the emergence of political, economic, legal and cultural institutions and how political actors act in them addressing following core questions o How institutions and their foundational ideas spread across geographic and ethnic borders o How these institutions change through the incorporation into domestic settings and national cultures o How outcomes of institutional change and adaptation can be appropriately conceptualised - in three sub-projects o 1. Paradigms, ideas and interests: cultural dispositions and the construction of history o 2. Culture or calculus? The instrumentalisation of meaning by elites o 3. Economic and political system in a post-imperial context	http://www.kompost.uni-muenchen.de/index.html
Kompetenznetz: Dynamiken von Religion in Südostasien/ Uni Göttingen, HU Berlin, Uni Heidelberg, Uni Hamburg, Uni Münster	1.04.2011-31.03.2015	- brings the context of 'religion' and 'modernity' to the centre stage and applies it to Southeast Asia - DORISEA mobilises regional scientific expertise against the background of two definitive traits of the region, namely o a plurality of religions and ethnicities o In Southeast Asia religion is not an antithesis to modernity, but instead is involved in a complex interaction with it - 3 dimensions of religious dynamics is approached o Practice o Politicisation of religion o Clash of Morals As wells as their linkages	http://www.dorisea.de/en
Kompetenznetz: Phantomgrenzen in Ostmitteleuropa/ Centre Marc Bloch, Uni Halle, GZ Berlin, HU Berlin	1.02.2011-31.01.2015	- Phantom boundaries describe former political boundaries of historic spaces such as the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburger Reich, division of Germany etc.) which structure contemporary spaces e.g. in elections, social practices etc. ("Remanenz-Phänomene") - Regional focus on Mideast-Europe and Eastern Europe - Focus on historical long-time effects as well as material and social structures and the political instrumentalisation of former boundaries; the diverse modi of phantom boundaries	http://phantomgrenzen.eu/

		- Disciplinary approach (history, social sciences, geography, political science, cultural science) with specific regional foci; case studies o Regional development paths in water supply and treatment in rural Romania o Transterritoriality of legislation: Post-Habsburg phantom borders and national legal traditions o Phantom borders in the geography of voting behaviour in Ukraine o Violence, history, geography: Symbolic and functional topographies of Polish hooligans o Triplex confinium. The city and phantom borders in South-Eastern Europe o Phantom borders in the Central Balkans o New borders – old borders: Symbolic demarcation processes and discourses on alterity in Vojvodina in the 1990s o Urban borders in post-Ottoman cities in o Southern Europe. Edirne and Niš from a comparative perspective o Nationalisation processes in Upper Silesia	
Transregionale Forschung/ Forum transregionale Studien & Max Weber Stiftung	1.04.2013-31.03.2018	- A research platform designed to promote research that connects systematic and region-specific questions in a perspective that addresses entanglements and interactions beyond national, cultural, and regional frames; Global conditions of society, communication, politics, and economics have an impact on all areas of life - Loose network/platform of five programmes with no specific concept/approach	http://www.forum-transregionale-studien.de/index.php

A2 – Poster zur Neu-Konzeption von Area Studies und Crossroads Asia

Zur Neu-Konzeption von Area Studies

CROSSROADS ASIA
Conflict · Migration · Development

Area Studies an sich

Area Studies verlangen die Kooperation verschiedener Disziplinen und ermöglichen es auch Einzelpersonen interdisziplinär zu arbeiten. Zudem kann es in den systematischen Disziplinen passieren, dass die Peripherie vernachlässigt wird. Area Studies ermöglichen es diese Lücke auszufüllen und die Peripherie in den Fokus zu stellen.
(Ildikó Bellér-Hann)

Gründe zum Über- und Neudenken von Area Studies

Der wichtigste Grund zum Überdenken von Regionalstudien ist die "Krise der Disziplinen". In den Area Studies aber auch in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften nutzen wir überwiegend Modelle und Theorien aus dem 19. Jahrhundert. (...) Ein anderer Aspekt ist, dass diese Modelle zur Beschreibung der europäischen oder westlichen Gesellschaften entwickelt wurden. Forschung, die sich mit anderen Gesellschaften befasst, versucht nun die Modelle anzupassen, damit sie auf andere Gesellschaften anwendbar sind. Die "Krise der Disziplinen" sollten Areanists nutzen und die Disziplinen durch Area Studies ersetzen.
(Vincent Van Houben)

Es geht mir darum - von dem Konzept der Grenze ausgehend - mich auf dessen Effekte und Charakteristika für den Menschen, der sich im betreffenden Raum bewegt, zu konzentrieren. Ein wichtiger Grund zum Überdenken von Area Studies ist daher, dass keine zwingende Kohärenz zwischen dem physischen Raum und dem kulturellen Raum besteht und es darum geht, einen neuen Ankerpunkt zu schaffen.
(Conrad Schetter)

Das Neudenken von Area Studies hat im Grunde genommen mit der Kritik des Denkens in nationalen Containern begonnen. Regionen sind aber oft noch konstruierter, da es an einem politischen Bindeglied fehlt und die Region von Außen auferlegt ist. Daher auch die Unsicherheit bzw. die unterschiedlichen Perzeptionen, was zu einer Region gehört. Ein gutes Beispiel ist hier Afghanistan im Kontext Südasien. Afghanistan gehört nicht zu der Region, Pakistan und Afghanistan sind aber heute ohne einander nicht denkbar.
(Martin Sökefeld)

Zum einen wurden Regionalstudien zur Zeit des Kalten Kriegs geo-politisch instrumentalisiert, dies fand vor dem Hintegrund einer internationalen Bipolarität statt, die heute nicht mehr zutrifft. Gerade Zentralasien befindet sich in der Post-Kalter-Krieg Situation in einem gesellschaftlichen Transformationsprozess. Globalisierungstendenzen und sozialer Wandel finden mit zunehmender Dynamik statt. Ein Beispiel ist hier Arbeitsmigration. Räumliches Containerdenken ist heute noch weniger zutreffend als zuvor.
(Anna-Katharina Hornidge)

Entwicklungsbedarf und -potential in den deutschen Area Studies

Entwicklungsbedarf besteht vor allem in einer Profilbildung, die international offensiver wird. Denn aufgrund der institutionellen Position Deutschlands im kalten Krieg sind Area Studies im deutschsprachigen Raum historisch nicht so belastet wie etwa in den USA oder in Russland. Statt sich abzugrenzen sollten Vertreter der Area Studies diesen Wind als gemeinsame Basis nutzen und über das Deutschsprachige hinaus gehen.
(Judith Schlehe)

Vernetzung von Area Studies und systematischen Disziplinen

Ich habe in den unterschiedlichen Ländern, in denen ich gearbeitet habe, eine Kluft zwischen Philologien und Sozialwissenschaften in den Area Studies beobachten können. Diese zwei Stränge sprechen eine unterschiedliche Sprache und es herrscht großes gegenseitiges Missvertrauen. Dies gilt es meines Erachtens zu ändern. Außerdem konnte ich oft beobachten, dass große intersdisziplinäre Projekte nicht funktionieren, da Interessen, Ansätze, Daten und Theorien zu unterschiedlich und teilweise unvereinbar waren.
(Ildikó Bellér-Hann)

Ich sehe eine extreme Bandbreite, zum Beispiel gibt es noch immer Orientalistentage, auf denen kulturspezifische Merkmale anhand klassischer Texte erarbeitet werden. Das erscheint mir unrealistisch und essentialistisch, ich halte zum Beispiel Konfuzius mittlerweile für veraltet.
(Vincent Van Houben)

Aus soziologischer Perspektive finde ich es interessant und relevant klassische soziologische Ansätze auf ihre Tauglichkeit im Untersuchen nicht-westlicher, sondern zentral- und südasiatischer Gesellschaften zu testen. Dies haben wir in den letzten Jahren am ZEF bezüglich Schütz' Konzeptes der Lebenswelten, Bourdieus Kapitalansatzes, Stichwehs Konzeptes der Eigenstrukturen der Weltgesellschaft, Becks Ansatzes der Risikogesellschaft und weiteren zu Usbekistan, Tadschikistan aber auch Indonesien gemacht. Die Frage jedoch bleibt: Was in den hervorgegangenen Erkenntnissen ist außer-westlicher soziologischer, was regionalwissenschaftlicher Natur?
(Anna-Katharina Hornidge)

Wie nennen wir unser Area Studies Konzept?

Ich assoziiere "Post" mit Post-Kolonialismus oder Post-Strukturalismus und finde den Begriff daher nicht sehr günstig. Mir stellt sich die Frage, was nach "Post" kommt. Man hat bereits alles dekonstruiert, jetzt muss es darum gehen, wieder zu konstruieren. Ich selbst bezeichne mich als Vertreter der New Area Studies, aber auch aus Mangel eines besseren Begriffes.
(Vincent Van Houben)

Der Begriff "Post Area Studies" wurde in Ermangelung eines besseren Begriffes gewählt, ist jedoch fragwürdig, da er impliziert, dass der physische Raum dekonstruiert werden soll. Wir stellen aber andere Raumdimensionen ins Zentrum der Untersuchung. New Area Studies knüpft widerum zu unmittelbar an den klassischen Area Studies-Konzepten an. In Anlehnung an "Critical Geographies" wäre Critical Area Studies ein guter Terminus, da wir den klassischen Area Studies kritisch gegenüber stehen.
(Conrad Schetter)

I personally think that even the need to invoke areas (with or without the prefix "post") has to do with the fact that we are still stuck in a model of production of knowledge which is Euro-Atlantic. The study of certain issues in Germany or the US is called "sociology", "political science" or "anthropology" as the case may be. When broadly similar sets of issues are studied in non-Western contexts "area studies", "post-area studies", "post-colonial theory" etc. are invoked, reminding us that knowledge production about the world is a metropolitan affair.
(Deniz Kandiyoti)

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Mobilities, Figurations und die 3 Arbeitsbereiche von Crossroads Asia

Das Potential der Konzepte Mobilität und Figurationen für überdachte Area Studies

Ich halte beide Konzepte für wichtig und die Aufstellung von Crossroads insofern für gelungen. Insbesondere die Verbindung von Figurationen und Mobilität finde ich fruchtbar. Ich versuche, von der Figurationenkonferenz inspiriert, Figurationen in meine Forschung einzubeziehen und beziehe mich dabei auf Elias.
(Ildikó Bellér-Hann)

The concepts of Figurations and Mobility have the advantage of addressing important thematic issues that feature in the literature on globalization and transnational flows whilst keeping a focus that is transregional (rather than area based). On the other hand it is so broadly defined that it could include just about any theme. It may be useful for the programme to develop middle-range concepts within sub-clusters of interest (e.g. the way in which this plays out in the field of conflict may be quite different from the circulation of cultural products etc.).
(Deniz Kandiyoti)

Für mich sind Area Studies ohne das Konzept der Mobilität nicht mehr denkbar. Dahingegen sind Figurationen für mich ein Bauchschmerzthema geworden. (...) Ich benutze in meiner Forschung beide Konzepte, Mobilität ist wie gesagt ein sehr zentrales Thema für mich und relevant für die Migrationsthematik. Vor Kurzen habe ich einen Artikel zu Warlords in Afghanistan verfasst, in dem das Konzept der Figurationen zum Tragen kam. Ich bleibe jedoch dabei, dass der theoretische Gehalt relativ gering ist, bzw. man mit Figurationen alles und nichts erklären kann.
(Conrad Schetter)

Mobilität und Mobilisierung sind wichtige Begriffe, da sie nicht an Grenzen stoppen, diese Grenzen können wie auch immer geartet sein. Ein Beispiel hierfür sind Globalisierungsströme. Kleine Globalisierungsströme können an innerregionalen Grenzen stehen bleiben aber auch transregionale Auswirkungen haben. Der Container "Region" kann mit diesem Begriff nach Innen und nach Außen neu gedacht werden. Mit dem Figurationenansatz von Elias haben wir uns gewissermaßen selbst einen Bären aufgebunden. Es ging Elias ja darum, den künstlichen Gegensatz zwischen Individuum und Gesellschaft zu überwinden. In diesem Bereich gibt es aber mittlerweile viel neuere Ansätze wie Giddens oder Bourdieu, die brauchbarer erscheinen. Ich bin nicht unbedingt der Meinung, dass wir uns von dem Figurationenbegriff verabschieden sollten, sondern vielleicht einfach von Elias weg denken.
(Martin Sökefeld)

Mobilität ist ein sehr wichtiges Konzept, da Dynamiken räumlicher Natur aufgegriffen werden, auch im Sinne sozialer Mobilität. Wichtig fände ich neben der Mobilität von Personen und Kapital, die Mobilität von Ideen und Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen mehr in den Vordergrund zu stellen. Das Figurationenkonzept hilft uns Prozesse nachzuzeichnen. Wir bleiben hier aber auf der deskriptiven Ebene verhaftet. Insofern schlage ich vor, über weitere sozialkonstruktivistische oder wissenssoziologische Konzepte nachzudenken, die das Figurationenkonzept ergänzen. Aufgabe unserer empirischen Arbeit ist es ja nicht nur zu beschreiben und zu erklären, sondern es geht auch um Theorieentwicklung. Der Figurationenansatz ist jedoch nicht theoretischer Natur. Darüberhinaus gibt es noch den ganz pragmatischen Grund, dass Elias derzeit in der Soziologie selbst kaum diskutiert wird.
(Anna-Katharina Hornidge)

Konflikt, Migration und Entwicklung und eine inhaltliche Weiterentwicklung von Crossroads Asia

The three themes are not, to my mind, really distinct. (...) I would let analytically grounded research problems dictate the contours of the "trans-region" that becomes *activated* in the process of empirical research. following people, goods, ideas and technologies is a better guide than delimiting themes. This itself could form the basis of a methodological paper on more inductive approaches as to what constitutes an "area" or a "region"; the contours of these may fluctuate in relation to the empirical problem at hand.
(Deniz Kandiyoti)

Die drei Themen Konflikt, Migration und Entwicklung greifen ineinander und ich würde stark dazu plädieren, diese als die zentralen Begriffe beizubehalten. Ergänzend zu den drei Begriffen kann man, aufbauend auf den Concept Papers, neue Themen andenken. Hier würden sich aus meiner Sicht Grenze und Mobilisierung anbieten. Ich denke außerdem, dass die Raumdimensionen Mobilität und Netzwerk ausreichen. (...) Man könnte die Konzeption einer zweiten Phase mit Jessop verschneiden, ich denke jedoch, dass das nicht nötig ist, auch da die Raumdimensionen nicht explizit als Themen des Netzwerks genannt werden müssen, um in den Arbeitsgruppen oder Teilprojekten eine Rolle zu spielen.
(Conrad Schetter)

Ich finde den themenzentrierten Ansatz von Crossroads naheliegend, sowohl zur Vernetzung als auch weil die Themen Konflikt, Migration und Entwicklung äußerst relevant sind und wir eine starke Eigenexpertise mitbringen. Zum Überdenken von Area Studies kann man auch über eine raumdimensionale oder konzeptionelle Vernetzung nachdenken. (...) Denkbare thematische Erweiterungen wären die Wissensthematik, also die Umstrukturierung der Wissenschaftssysteme oder das Thema Umwelt. Für viel wichtiger als neue Themen halte ich jedoch zum einen eine stärkere Raumfixierung, die Ausweitung des Mobilitätsansatzes auf die Reise von Ideen und Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen und vor allem eine theoretische Einbettung und Auswertung bisheriger Forschungsergebnisse.
(Anna-Katharina Hornidge)

Die Begriffe Konflikt und Migration sind klassisch grenz- oder regionenübergreifend. Gerade in der Crossroads Region zeigen Konflikte, dass man nicht in nationalstaatlichen oder regionalen Kontexten denken kann. Migration verbindet in meinen Augen die Region mit dem globalen Kontext: Wie steht die Region, die eigentlich keine ist, in der Welt da? Ich denke, die weiteren transregionalen Beziehungen sind ein interessanter Ansatz für eine inhaltliche Weiterentwicklung. Nicht welche transregionalen Netzwerke konstituieren Crossroads Asia, sondern welche Beziehungen konstituieren die Region nach außen? Beispielsweise verhandeln die USA jetzt mit den Taliban in Doha. Das wirft die Frage auf, wie dieser Konflikt im weiteren politischen Raum verortet wird und wie er immer wieder neu konstituiert wird.
(Martin Sökefeld)

Ich sehe, dass die materielle Kultur vernachlässigt wird. Dies geschieht weil Mobilität so breit verstanden wird. Es ist auch gut, dass Mobilität von Ideen und Menschen untersucht wird, dies sollte jedoch nicht auf Kosten der materiellen Kultur geschehen. Denn Gegenstände sprechen auch.
(Ildikó Bellér-Hann)

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Information on the competence network Crossroads Asia

The competence network Crossroads Asia derives its name from the geographical area extending from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. Scholars collaborating in the competence network pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach, making thematic figurations and mobility the overarching perspectives of their research in Crossroads Asia. The concept of figuration implies that changes, minor or major, within one element of a constellation always affect the constellation as a whole; the network will test the value of this concept for understanding the complex structures framed by the cultural, political and socio-economic contexts in Crossroads Asia. Mobility is the other key concept for studying Crossroads Asia, which has always been a space of entangled interaction and communication, with human beings, ideas and commodities on the move across and beyond cultural, social and political borders. Figurations and mobility thus form the analytical frame of all three main thematic foci of our research: conflict, migration and development.

- Five sub-projects in the working group **"Conflict"** will focus upon specific localised conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood and globalisation effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena associated with the diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in Crossroads Asia, the sub-projects aim to analyse the logic of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with, conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.

- Six sub-projects in the working group **"Migration"** aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within Crossroads Asia as well as figurations extending into both neighbouring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organisational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualising empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans-local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.

- In the **"Development"** working group, four sub-projects focus on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents, and secondly, on forms of social mobility which may create new opportunities but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

The competence network aims to mediate between the academic study of Crossroads Asia and efforts to meet the high demand for information on this area in politics and the public. Findings of the project will feed back into academic teaching, research outside the limits of the competence network and public relations efforts. Further information on Crossroads Asia is available at www.crossroads-asia.de.

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Crossroads Asia Concept Papers

- Working Group Conflict (2012): Conflict Research on Crossroads Asia – A Conceptual Approach. In: Crossroads Asia Concept Paper Series, No. 1.
- Working Group Development (2012): Development at the Crossroads. Development Research on Crossroads Asia – A Conceptual Approach. In: Crossroads Asia Concept Paper Series, No. 2.
- Working Group Migration (2012): Crossroads Asia through the Lens of Mobility and Migration – A Conceptual Approach. In: Crossroads Asia Concept Paper Series, No. 3.