



INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
Faculty of Social Sciences
Charles University

Call for papers

Rethinking Area Studies for the 21st Century

A workshop on the contemporary purpose and practice
of the discipline

May 20-21, 2024

Prague, Institute of International Studies, Charles University

The discipline of Area Studies has been subject to a growing number of academic debates in recent years. The preoccupation with the discipline emerged as a reaction to Russia's geopolitical adventurism and aggression in Eastern Europe, but also – for instance – as part of the broader debate about the unsuccessful allied attempts to institutionally rebuild and democratize Iraq and Afghanistan after military interventions in the respective countries. More thorough and nuanced area-specific knowledge was often argued to be a possible solution to both defusing tensions between NATO and Russia and facilitating Iraq's and Afghanistan's transition to stable and legitimate governance.

Though not a panacea to the geopolitical ails of the contemporary world, Area Studies claims to see beyond universalizing theoretical approaches of the social sciences that often distort policy decisions. The discipline provides an epistemology rooted in the in-depth empirical knowledge of local economic, social, cultural and political realities, which may not conform to the theoretical knowledge produced in other parts of the world.

Arguably, the development of Area Studies as a discipline faces a positive momentum unprecedented since the end of the Cold War. For too long, Area Studies has been discarded as a discipline with a history of being overly politicized and even irrelevant for the 21st century. But it is no coincidence that researchers are now returning to basic inquiries posed by Area Studies and attempting to unearth social complexities that are often neglected by currently applied theoretical frameworks.

With the slow but steady revival of Area Studies, the discipline is still struggling with presenting and justifying its contributions to our understanding of the social reality. It is thereby imperative to debate what is “expected” of Area Studies academically, but also in terms of its policy and social function.



In order to avoid the mistakes that led to Area Studies' demise and disregard in the post-Cold War period, the discipline needs to reexamine the following questions:

- What is the position of Area Studies toward universality in the social sciences?
- How to prevent the “re-politicization” of the discipline in the face of competition and multipolarity in the global context?
- Can the discipline shed its “colonial” and “colonizing” aspects and functions?
- How relevant are Area Studies approaches to understanding China's rise, the war in Ukraine, the Israeli-Arab conflict, etc.?
- What positions should Area Studies specialists adopt toward their research for which there is high political demand?
- How to avoid and identify inherent biases in Area Studies' methods and epistemology?

The workshop is being organized by the Institute of International Studies at Charles University as part of its 30-year anniversary celebrations. Since its founding in 1994, the Institute has been devoted to teaching and developing the discipline of Area Studies in the national and international contexts.

We are looking forward to receiving your proposals (abstract of no more than 400 words) through this [Google Form](#) by **January 20, 2024**. Selected contributions will be communicated by mid-February 2024.

There will be **no conference fee**. We expect the participants to cover their travel and accommodation expenses. Participants will have access to a special rate in University accommodation facilities subject to availability. A limited number of travel grants for early career researchers may be available. Depending on the focus of the contributions, the conveners plan to coordinate the publication of a special journal issue as a result of the workshop.

Organizer: [Institute of International Studies](#) – Dr. Jan Hornát & Dr. Tomáš Weiss

For further information or questions, please feel free to contact us: jan.hornat@fsv.cuni.cz.