

# Forum Transregionale Studien



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## Call for Applications

Submission Deadline:  
April 8, 2018

## Infrastructures, Regions and Urbanizations

**Transregional Academy**

September 29 – October 7, 2018  
Singapore

Forum  
Transregionale  
Studien



Max Weber  
Stiftung  
Deutsche  
Geisteswissenschaftliche  
Institute im Ausland



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The Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien and the Max Weber Stiftung – Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland in cooperation with the National University Singapore (NUS) cordially invite doctoral and postdoctoral scholars from the humanities and social sciences to apply for a Transregional Academy. It will be convened **from September 29th to October 7th 2018 at NUS in Singapore** on the topic of “Infrastructures, Regions and Urbanizations” and chaired by Andreas Eckert (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Weiqiang Lin, James D. Sidaway (both National University of Singapore) and Franz Waldenberger (Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien, Tokyo). It is arranged in cooperation with the Max Weber Foundation Research Group on Borders, Mobility and New Infrastructures and the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.

Deadline: Applications received by **April 8th, 2018** and addressed to: [academies@trafo-berlin.de](mailto:academies@trafo-berlin.de)

## Rationale

**Infrastructure** has become a lively domain of scholarship. Whilst often seemingly mundane and quotidian, the politics, histories and geographies associated with infrastructures invite critical scrutiny and are a mirror to wider, socio-economic, historical-geographical and natural trajectories. It is less than a century since the term infrastructure entered the English lexicon to signify a range of facilities, amenities and equipment: “Infrastructure became a word only in 1927, seemingly long after the idea came into existence.”, as David Alff noted (2017, “Before infrastructure: the poetics of paving in John Gay’s Trivia”, Proceedings of the Modern Language Association, 132, 5). Elsewhere, Alff shows how infrastructural projects, invariably “began as written proposals, circulated as print objects, spurred physical undertakings, and provoked responses in the realms of poetry, fiction, and drama. Mapping this process discloses the ways in which ....authors applied their faculties of imagination to achieve finite goals and, in so doing, devised new ways of seeing the world through its future potential” (David Alff, 2017, The Wreckage of Intentions, Projects in British Culture, 1660-1730, Philadelphia).

Infrastructure has both tangible, material forms, such as roads, cables, wharfs, power and water grids and more intangible forms, such as formalized and informal civil society socio-political networks and institutions. The interactions between these forms and between infrastructures and regions merit examination. **Regions** may include “areas” (such as Southeast or Central Asia or territorial states or subnational and cross-border regions) and the scholarly approaches to them. The latter include a range of area studies traditions, trans-area studies as well as alternative approaches, as in the discussions around “Zomia” as a name for a region in-between the more conventionally-recognized ones of Central, South, East and Southeast Asia (William van Schendel, 2002, “Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia.” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 20).

Infrastructure can be seen as a form of spatial-temporal “fix” within the circulation of capital, goods and services. Infrastructures connect places with different capabilities and power. Especially, if you integrate a stronger value chain or/and global production network, crucial questions arise about who, where and what will be able to appropriate value. Infrastructures consolidate and transform uneven development, regional value regimes and landscapes at diverse, interacting and often contested scales. These include territorial states, regional organizations (such as ASEAN, the EU or APEC and the Trans-Pacific Partnership), cross-border formations (such as the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle, sometimes known as SIJORI) and cities.

In regard of latter, the problematique of **urbanization** has also become a very lively subject of scholarly debate. This includes claims that sociologically and in terms of reconfigurations of space and nature, urban-centred networks span the globe, and hence the development of arguments that the appropriate analytical lens should be “planetary urbanization” bestowing a network perspective on cities, resources



and territories. This work draws on earlier writings on the theme by Henri Lefebvre (Neil Brenner, ed. 2014, *Implosions/Explosions. Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, Berlin).

Such claims about the universalization of the urban have been contested by a range of scholars attesting the value of other analytical scales and perspectives (see the forthcoming special issue of *Society and Space* on planetary urbanization) on cities, urbanization, rurality, postcoloniality and social life.

Either way, regions and inter-city dynamics are themselves continually reconfigured by infrastructure. A significant contemporary example, is China's Belt and Road initiative that promises to reconfigure the spaces of Eurasia and East Asia's interactions with the rest of Asia, the wider Indian Ocean and beyond into Africa. What does this signify for Asia's (and other) regions and for area studies? How might it be conceptualized through critical geopolitics and/or mobilities studies?

We invite papers that consider any of these or allied questions from Asia and other regions, which might include Africa, the Pacific, Europe and the Americas, or indeed other ways of thinking about regional formations and knowledges. We are interested equally in contemporary and historical cases, and diverse and dissident approaches to these questions from across the humanities and social sciences, at all scales (from bodily to planetary) and their interconnections.

Applicants are advised to consult the website of the [Forum Transregionale Studien](#) and the blog [Trafo—Blog for Transregional Research](#) as well as the website of the [Inter-Asia Engagements cluster](#). Those axes would be included, but far from become exclusive foci, within the Academy, which invites, case studies, comparisons and connections.

## Structure

The Academy aims to provide a forum for scholars in social sciences and humanities who are interested in discussing and exchanging on questions of material and immaterial infrastructures, regions and urbanization in past and present societies in diverse contexts.

The Transregional Academy promotes intensive peer-to-peer debates and encourages new perspectives grown from debates in small discussion groups. Participants take an active part in contributing to the program's structure and content. They present their individual research, co-design thematic discussion groups, and are involved in organizing the workshops. While most of the work is conducted in an intensive small-group atmosphere, the Transregional Academy also presents its work to the public through general lectures and open panel discussions. For more information on the format please visit our Transregional Academies blog: [academies.hypotheses.org](http://academies.hypotheses.org).

## Organization

The Transregional Academy is chaired by the above-mentioned group of scholars and organized by the Forum Transregionale Studien and the Max Weber Stiftung in cooperation with the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.

The Transregional Academy will invite up to 21 doctoral and postdoctoral scholars from different countries and academic backgrounds to present and discuss their current research within an international and multi-disciplinary framework. The Academy is designed to support scholarly networks.

For questions regarding the concept of the Academy, please contact Franz Waldenberger: [waldenberger@dijtokyo.org](mailto:waldenberger@dijtokyo.org);

for questions regarding eligibility and format, please contact Alix Winter: [academies@trafo-berlin.de](mailto:academies@trafo-berlin.de); T: +49 (0)30 89 001-424; F: +49 (0)30 89 001-440.

## Conditions of Application and Procedure

Travel, accommodation and provisioning of the participants will be fully covered. The program targets doctoral, postdoctoral, and early-mid career researchers who wish to present their ongoing projects in both a comparative perspective and in relation to the questions raised above. We welcome both projects focused on Asia as well as other world areas/regions or the connections between them. However the researchers' work should be clearly relevant to the themes of the Transregional Academy. The working language is English.

The application should likewise be in English and consist of:

- a curriculum vitae;
- an outline of the project (300 words max.) on which the applicant is currently working;
- a brief motivation letter which describes the relevance of the own research for the topic of the Academy;
- two suggested readings relevant to the Academy and which you would like to discuss with other participants (please provide bibliographical data only, no copies of the suggested readings are required);
- the names of two university faculty members who can serve as referees (no letters of recommendation required).

**Sent by e-mail as one PDF file by April 8th, 2018 to [academies@trafo-berlin.de](mailto:academies@trafo-berlin.de)**

Applicants will be notified with the result of the selection process by mid-May, 2018. Successful applicants will be asked to submit by August 1st, 2018 the draft of a research paper, draft chapter of their PhD or comparable work (6,000 words max.) to be discussed at the event.

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The event is subject to the provision of funding.

The Transregional Academy is part of the strategic cooperation between the Forum Transregionale Studien and the Max Weber Stiftung - Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland. It is supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF).

The Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien is a research organization that promotes the internationalization of research in the humanities and social sciences. It is dedicated to a research agenda that systematically links disciplinary approaches and the expertise of area studies, by focusing on entanglements and interactions across national, cultural or regional borders. The Forum is supported by the Land of Berlin.

The Max Weber Stiftung promotes global research, concentrated around the areas of social sciences, cultural studies, and the humanities. Research is conducted at ten institutes in various countries worldwide with distinctive and independent focal points. Through its globally operating institutes, the Foundation is able to contribute to the communication and networking between Germany and the host countries or regions of its establishments.

**For more information please see:**

[academies.hypotheses.org](http://academies.hypotheses.org)

[forum-transregionale-studien.de](http://forum-transregionale-studien.de)

[maxweberstiftung.de](http://maxweberstiftung.de)

[ari.nus.edu.sg/](http://ari.nus.edu.sg/)

[www.fas.nus.edu.sg/researchclusters/max-weber-foundation-research-group-on-borders-mobility-and-new-infrastructures](http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/researchclusters/max-weber-foundation-research-group-on-borders-mobility-and-new-infrastructures)