

Second Call for Papers

Workshop: Regional conflicts and contested spatial identities in the digital sphere

3-4 November 2017, Erlangen, Germany

Organizers: Georg Glasze, Christian Bittner and Elad Segev

Social identity often plays a major role in settings of regional conflicts. Hegemonic actors or majority groups promote narratives that justify claims on territory, natural resources or simply political power. Marginalized groups are mobilized through counter narratives of being a community of fate, sharing a common history, destiny and cultural heritage. In these struggles, influence upon and access to communication media constitutes a vital strategic value. These relationships can be witnessed in manifold regional conflicts, be it in Israel/Palestine, in Ukraine, the Kashmir region, Western Sahara, Catalonia, etc.

Digital communication technologies have created new opportunities for information flows across borders and social groups of all kinds and scales. Online platforms are employed for participation, empowerment, and emancipation of marginalized groups, providing new actors with the ability to articulate their perspectives and reach a wider audience. Together with social inclusion, there are various patterns of communication exclusion, such as language bubbles, content filters, demographic biases, skill levels, governmental restrictions, or the unequal distribution of net infrastructures. While acknowledging the empowering potential of the internet, new studies emphasize also the (re)production and manifestation of uneven power structures and societal hierarchies through and within the internet. These multifaceted inclusion/exclusion mechanisms can be summarized under the umbrella term of digital divide(s).

Within these heterogeneous socio-technological constellations, we want to assess the transformative potential of the internet for contested spatial identities in the settings of regional conflicts. How are conflicting identities negotiated in the digital sphere? To what extent are marginalized voices and perspectives being articulated through digital communication technologies? What strategies do traditional gatekeepers and hegemonic actors pursue to maintain their privileged speaker positions? What is the role of digital divides or state restrictions on digital communication infrastructures?

The proposed workshop wants to bring together international scholars from various academic disciplines who are involved in critical research on online-negotiations of spatial identities in the context of regional conflicts. It aspires an assessment and systematization of the various dimensions of collective identity formation in the internet as well as fruitful exchange on methodological aspects of online and offline research in the thematic field.

Specific topics through which presentations may interrogate the relationship between regional conflicts, spatial identities and the digital sphere include but are not limited to:

- Social media platforms as means for the articulation of spatial identities
- Implications of the digital sphere for activism, anti-geopolitics, peace movements and subaltern articulations
- Involvements of nation state-actors in digital negotiations of spatial identities
- The role of infrastructures for enabling, precluding and surveilling digital communication
- Strategies of diaspora communities and the digital formation of spatial identities

- Transformations of speaker positions and power relations within identity groups through digital technologies

- Exclusion mechanisms such as digital divides or internet restrictions

The workshop will take place at the Institute for Geography, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany, 3.-4. November 2017.

Please address abstracts (max. 250 words) along with institutional affiliation and a short bio (max. 150 words) to: sarah.leuders@fau.de. *Deadline is 15 July 2017.*