

May 15, 2014: Reflexivity and epistemic plurality in area studies

Every sub-project of the Academy presented a key statement that gave an empirically suitable and epistemologically reflexive definition of area studies from their disciplinary perspective. The discussion that followed focused on the plurality of approaches in an interdisciplinary project such as 'Future Africa' and was related to the constructedness of space and time as well as the need for reflexivity and positionality in area studies. It also clarified common open questions such as a) in what sense are (spatial) boundaries, (national) borders and (social, cultural) distinctions real, relevant and powerful? And b) how can non-linear time and unbound, relational space be examined? Attention was then given to methodological suggestions, resulting in the aims of trying not to generalize and universalize area studies; questioning the subject of research; and reflecting on geographical thinking, its ideological implications, and on the entanglement of areas. As a further outcome, the academy members decided to increase the exchange of their experiences to transfer these questions, epistemological presumptions and solutions into empirical practice.