Forschung – Lehre – Information

To Transfer, but Not to Serve? Central Asian Studies Inside Out: A Workshop Report

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Introduction

"Central Asian Studies should be relevant, but not at the price of their independence" — such could be, in one sentence, the said result of the debate led by the early-career researchers taking part in the two-day workshop "Central Asian Studies Inside Out" (CASIO). On February 8–9, 2018, the workshop brought together masters and PhD students from different European universities at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient and the Institute for Asian and African Studies at Humboldt University Berlin, to discuss knowledge transfer between Central Asian Studies on the one side and social and political actors outside of academia on the other. A core goal was to address a structural problem faced by Central Asian Studies: scholars of area studies produce knowledge of high social and political value, but it usually remains within very concise circles. Apart from only a few exceptions, such as the Central Asian seminar at Humboldt University, research on Central Asia in Europe is usually marginalized within wider disciplines and poorly connected, not to speak of the very limited access to expertise produced within the region itself. Organizing a workshop dedicated to the topic of Central Asian Studies and knowledge transfer was meant, then, as a way to underline the dynamics of the field and the mutual benefits of engagement with practitioners.

Thus, what do Central Asian Studies have to offer? As Botakoz Kassymbekova underlined in her keynote speech, a core role of the humanities and social sciences in dealing with Central Asia is to challenge the grand narratives on the region. In giving voice to previously unheard people and highlighting the unexpected, scholars can point to many realities missed out on by problem-oriented research. To do this, scholars need to get out of the "comfort zone" of their area studies. Indeed, given the funding threats that institutions like the Central Asian seminar at Humboldt University now face, scholars of area studies need to underline the relevance of their work for a wider audience.

What role can knowledge transfer play in this context?

Our workshop was certainly not the first time this issue has been discussed. Knowledge transfer is not a new topic, and its relevance to the humanities is increasingly advocated. However, the abovementioned scattering of the field makes it difficult to connect to previous discussions. We thus hope that by discussing some of our core arguments in this report, we can carry this debate into other circles and engage in further conversation with other interested actors too. We also want to emphasize the importance of the engagement of all relevant actors in the discussion: knowledge transfer is an important topic not only for academia, and for more than just one given area studies discipline.

Political actors taking part in the workshop were very much interested in the topic. Among others, Heidrun Tempel, Deputy Director-General for Research and Academic Relations Policy and Cultural Relations Policy of the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, emphasized the demand of her administration for more connection with academia. However, this engagement seems to be hampered by the need to translate the findings of research in area studies into one-page policy notes. Also, while discussing possibilities of knowledge transfer, independent research should always be a premise herein. While the better communication of the relevance of Central Asian Studies could help to solve the funding issues currently faced by the discipline, the humanities should nevertheless not be forced to justify their existence.

With these challenges in mind, the workshop was an open floor to think about knowledge transfer on both a theoretical and practical level. On the one hand we discussed the relevance of our own research for a broader audience, and on the other we listened to those "on the outside." The aim of the workshop was not to solve the problems of knowledge transfer in two days, but rather to create a platform for an exchange of ideas — both during the workshop itself and in the future going forward.

The present report consists of three parts (written by three participants of the workshop), each representing a "target" for knowledge transfer: politics and development cooperation; business; and, media. Each part reflects the view of its author and does not represent all of the opinions voiced during the workshop. Together, the three parts give an idea of the scope of the discussion.

In the first part, Björn Reichhardt discusses our meeting with a representative of the German Committee on Eastern European Relations (OA). He argues that European companies have an increasing interest in knowledge on the region. However European social sciences usually do not share their neoliberal top-down approach and could rather provide in-depth knowledge on local communities, whose interests are often neglected by companies investing in the region. In her text on possibilities of cooperation with political institutions, Mariya Petrova, in the second part, points to the reservations many scholars have regarding this topic. On a personal as well as

on an institutional level, the danger of serving political interests and compromising academic freedom is high. The third and final part is dedicated to the representation of Central Asia in the media. In this context, Davlatbegim Mamadshoeva points to structural problems in the cooperation between academia and the media and proposes an optimistic view on the role of the former in improving the coverage of Central Asia.

Academic knowledge as an answer to the ramifications of business interests and their impact on local societies

In recent years, the European Union and European states such as Germany have shown increasing interest in the political and economic dynamics in Central Asia. Moreover, with the introduction of the free market economy, multinational enterprises have started to operate in Central Asian countries, with a particular interest in the region's mineral resource wealth. Parallel to this and despite generating valuable knowledge, academia working on the region — particularly in the social sciences — is facing drastic cutbacks. While the difficulties arising in the case studies presented during the workshop are rooted in their very particular environments, they simultaneously point toward broader overlapping issues of uncertainty and conflict unfolding in times of neoliberal crisis — wherein relations of power among relevant actors remain broadly unfamiliar. In this essay, I will draw on the intricate forms and boundaries of knowledge transfer between business interests, local interests and academic research.

In this context, I argue that by engaging in holistic and proactive research strategies the broad field of Central Asian Studies can meet challenges created from the ramifications of business interests and their impact on local societies. Taking up the momentum of the workshop, however, knowledge transfer as a process sincerely needs to be questioned. This section aims, therefore, at discussing knowledge transfer by taking into account power relations and hierarchies among the different actors specifically in mining enterprises in Kyrgyzstan.

Central Asia as a bigger region enjoys great wealth in fossil and mineral resources. Yet, after the breakup of state socialism, the Central Asian nation-states widely failed, and continue to fail to convert their resource wealth into benefits for their economies and to disseminate this wealth to their populations. Instead, exports of gas, oil, coal, and copper are mainly profitable for elites in urban centers and multinational enterprises, whereas revenues flow into offshore bank accounts of high-ranking politicians — as recent events in Mongolia have shown (Erdene 2016). Simultaneously, the population at large has no other choice but to navigate the political instabilities and socioeconomic insecurities that have so far been perpetuated throughout post-socialist times individually.

During the second day of the workshop, Beril Ocaklı has been invited as a guest speaker to give a presentation on knowledge transfer between business and academia. Ocaklı is a doctoral researcher at the Integrative Research Institute on Transformations of Human-Environment Systems (IRI THESys) at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin where she independently researches the dynamics of mining conflicts in Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, she has been working at the German Committee on Eastern European Relations (OA) until April 2018. With her expertise in both academia and international relations, she introduced the participants to her transdisciplinary research as well as to German business interests in Central Asia with a focus on international organizations.

The OA is an institution founded in 1952 that represents German business interests in Eastern Europe, Southeastern Europe, Russia, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Together with the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), the OA has initiated the "Mineral Resources for Development in Central Asia" program. Operating in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the program's objectives include among others the improvement of framework conditions for trade and investments for establishing long-term alliances beyond the next resource crisis.[1]

In Kyrgyzstan, different actors in the economic, political, and social spheres see mining as a major key for development. In fact, during the 1990s, the reactivation of the Kumtor gold mine by Centerra Gold, a controversial Canadian mining company, significantly decreased the inflation rate created through the first years of the free market economy. Nevertheless, despite creating employment and economic growth, conflicts around Kumtor and other mining projects arose — and continue to increase. Resource wealth, accordingly, cannot only be understood as bliss, but bears high, multidimensional risks for ecological systems and marginalized parts of society. Opposite to positive developments, then, mining activities always go hand in hand with environmental destruction, social disruptions, and, eventually, provide "a source of state resources for plunder by both national and international elites" (Doolot and Heathershaw 2015: 97).

With these preconditions set, Ocaklı embarked on conducting empirical research in Kyrgyzstan in order to strengthen the involvement of local population groups in mining policies and international cooperation programs. Identifying Kyrgyzstan as a resource-cursed economy, Ocaklı stressed how the country fails to generate sustainable development from its mineral wealth. One major question she addressed during the workshop focused on the rules and legal settings that influence mining, asking for "how do institutional dynamics encompassing the perceived properties of mining transactions and actors' beliefs reinforce or mitigate conflict?"

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1   As presented by Beril Ocaklı during the workshop.

During the workshop session on business-related topics, Ocaklı then invited the participants to split into groups and think of a scenario in the mining or general business sector that bears potential for conflict and find strategies for mediating between interest groups and to mitigate developing problems. The leading questions were 1) where and why do I come in, 2) how do I methodologically approach it, and 3) whom and how do I communicate my research? While the groups did not have difficulties to draw on the first two questions, eagerly exemplifying cases of conflict or injustice in the mining and business sector, responding to the third problem developed more complex. Soon, the participants had to conclude that mediation between the multiple levels of actors and interests in the mining and business sector resembles a walk on a tightrope.

Similar to Ocaklı, most of the participants were interested in supporting the less powerful parties in the hypothetical mining conflicts through evidence based on long-term and in-depth research. However, how can researchers successfully and sustainably transfer such evidence into the spheres of business interests in order to create balanced power relations?

Business interests manifest along value chains. In the mining sector, with regard to the extraction of mineral resources, these value chains base their production on what Tsing defines as 'salvage capitalism' or "taking advantage of value produced without capitalist control" (Tsing 2015: 63). What is controllable, however, is the governance of adding value in the production process and the governance of value chain actors. By engaging in a competitive industry such as mining, and according to their program's objectives, international organizations such as the OA or GIZ also engage in processes of governance. Governance in value chains or, in particular, global commodity chains focuses on relations of power within production and controls the assignment and flow of financial, material and personnel resources (Gereffi et al. 1994: 96). How might governance, then, in the Kyrgyz mining industry look like?

Various cases across Central Asia have shown how mining policies that represent business interests often leave out those population groups that face the most severe hardships created through mining, leaving them with social and environmental detriment (Gullette and Kalybekova 2014; Myadar and Jackson 2018). Despite being often highly promoted, matters of social responsibility and sustainability are not being addressed appropriately in practice. What often remains neglected in value chains, then, are the unequal distribution of power and the power relations between different interest groups.

In fact, controversies circulating extractive industries and mining policies have oftentimes led to local forms of civil protest in Central Asian countries. Nevertheless, such protests are often stigmatized as 'resource nationalism' to

discredit public grievances "by those who promote neoliberalism and open markets" (Myadar and Jackson 2018: 3).

In Kyrgyzstan, as in other neoliberal societies around the globe, elites are able to exploit political and economic power for their own benefit and generate opportunity costs through which society is excluded from political-formation processes and profits privately skimmed from the increase of general welfare (Dörre 2014). Wouldn't collaborating with these elites, therefore, contribute to a unilateral dialogue, leading to the question of how it can be constructive when all participants basically look in the same direction from the very beginning anyway?

Speaking as a workshop participant, far from the lived realities affected by mining in Kyrgyzstan, and drawing on partially self-made scenarios in a group exercise, it is difficult to judge to what extend German international organizations successfully and sustainably implement their objectives. Do they disseminate their normative power, that is e.g. "shaping […] the guidelines to be followed with respect to worker rights and factory conditions" (Gereffi and Lee 2014: 28), or alternatively to local populations and environments, in appropriate ways? All too often, when it comes to research and academia, there are more questions than answers.

Nevertheless, it can be stated that both dialogue in the sense of international cooperation and knowledge transfer from an academic perspective need to be extended in order to involve and empower other actors that need an appropriate platform to promote civil society interests in an unfiltered and independent manner. Indeed, there is no constructive dialogue without diverging positions and, eventually, it is opposed positions that lead to more comprehensive and constructive results.

With regard to mining conflicts in Kyrgyzstan, the social anthropologist David Gullette suggests a useful concept that offers guidance for creating constructive knowledge transfer and overcoming opaque value chains. According to Gullette (2014: 4), "conflict can be defined as a non-cooperative relationship among actors situated within a social, economic and political context." In this context, it appears helpful to further look at Gullette (2014: 5) turning to 'conflict sensitivity', which he explains as an

> approach through which an organization, group or individual attempts to: [1] understand the context in which they are operating; [2] understand the interaction(s) between their intervention and the context; and [3] act upon the understanding of this interaction, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts.

Accordingly, it is important to not stigmatize public protest nor to promote 'resource nationalism' but to put things into perspective: "Events are unquestionably important indicators of social conditions, but they need to be considered against the backdrop of long-term realities and processes" (McChesney 1996: 8). This is what academic

research does. The very strength of academic work and research, especially in the social sciences, lies in the in-depth analysis and understanding of local, regional, and transregional realities as well as processes. Studying the peculiarities of issues arising from the interaction of different and often contrasting interests, academia creates the actual material to fill knowledge gaps and to tackle the problems and conflicts at stake. But to put this into effect, we certainly need to rethink knowledge transfer as it is practiced, but we also need appropriate room and space to transfer our knowledge.

Central Asian Studies in the tension between self-confidence and political agenda

The issue of cooperation between academia and politics is no easy one: As the discussions during the workshop have shown, there is antagonism and reluctance especially on the side of academia. Scholars are far from being ready to embrace foreign policy agencies. In this part of the report, I would like to briefly outline the discussions on this topic during the workshop and to retrace and understand the arguments and reasons for the persistent skepticism and concerns of many scholars regarding cooperation between academia and politics. Being an early-career scholar, I will speak from the academic perspective as I myself understand it.

The first session of the second day, "Knowledge Transfer between Central Asian Studies and Actors in Development Cooperation," was a talk with a representative from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). He presented the core programs and priority areas that the BMZ works on and highlighted the possibilities for us as scholars to attach to its projects. One of these possibilities could be involvement in research projects at developmental research institutes such as the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) and German Development Institute (DIE), which are close partners of the ministry and embody the idea of knowledge transfer from academia into practice. This talk left a twofold impression: In parts it reminded me of career consultancy, as cooperation and knowledge transfer between academia and politics were discussed in terms of individual possibilities for scholars to enrich governmental development projects with their research and expertise. One could always knock on the door with a research topic, with the chance for its implementation — it should only fit into the current priorities of the BMZ. On the other hand, a considerable number of fellow workshop participants seemed to have reservations about cooperation with the ministry at all, taking a rather skeptical and defensive position. But where does this skepticism come from?

The BMZ focuses mostly on topics like sustainable development, renewable energy, governance, and the performance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is, without doubt, a wide field of research; yet it covers only a part of the whole

spectrum of topics researched within the context of Central Asian Studies. Therefore research topics with an interest beyond a developmental agenda remain excluded, and the amount of potentially interested researchers is reduced at this stage. With the relevance-usefulness narrative in the background of our debate, this implies that all other research interests are not relevant since they do not serve the practical aims of foreign policy.

The nature of this session of the workshop was symptomatic of the relationship between Central Asian Studies and politics: On the one side, there is a small discipline being faced with financial cuts and demands for providing evidence of its usefulness and relevance. On the other, a huge and well-financed state institution seeing scholars, as one participant summed up, "as tools for its own agenda." For Central Asian Studies, speaking of partnership in such circumstances means taking the role of petitioner. The meeting with one of BMZ's senior employees illustrated on a small scale one of the crucial problems faced: the inequality between the two parties, leading to an uncomfortable situation for even starting a negotiation about their possible partnership.

Unfortunately and remarkably, the possibilities of cooperation between institutions were barely brought up during the discussion. It seemed that it was much easier to consider cooperation and transfer in terms of individual engagement. Existing examples demonstrate on the one side the complexity of such constructions and confirm the assumption that it works at best in the field of Political Science.[2]

Further difficulties and concerns related to cooperation might be explained with profoundly different approaches to the production and implementation of knowledge between academia and politics respectively. In the humanities, knowledge is usually produced out of interest in a particular topic or phenomena, influenced by scholarly trends and schools, and embedded in a specific context. It is an open-ended process without a particular utilitarian aim. In the case of politics — here foreign policy offices (diplomacy or development) — knowledge is needed for the decision makers to be able to assess the situation on the ground, to coordinate, and to provide the basis for decisions. Knowledge transfer here means a translation into a completely different form, language, and volume. This is the next critical point, which appeared several times during the workshop: the form and especially the volume of scientific information that the policy actors are able to digest. The two-to-four-pages-long policy papers are in clear contradiction to what an average scholarly work looks like. Besides the challenge of such a "shrinking" process itself, there is justified doubt that research compressed to this extent cannot wholly depict the complexity of its object. And what kind of decisions are made based on that shortened information? This might be a common practice in the world of politics; as scholars, however, we

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2   One example is the Sonderforschungsbereich 700 "Governance in Räumen begrenzter Staatlichkeit", www.sfb-governance.de/teilprojekte/projektbereich_t/t3/index.html.

have to decide for ourselves if we want to become a part of this system or even legitimate it. As well as answering the following question too: Can research produced directly for the use of politics truly remain free and independent? Will it be possible to conduct open-ended and critical research when funding is dependent on the governmental partner, or at least on good work with them?

The last concern I would like to bring up in the course of my argumentation here is the one of the ethical limits of cooperation with politics, which depends not only on the personality of the researcher but also on the moral foundations of the research institution regarding where to draw the line. The BMZ and its involvement in Afghanistan, where it is engaged on a large scale, is a good example. As a scholar of Central Asian Studies one is more or less acquainted and concerned with the situation in this country and cannot deny the necessity of development in nearly all areas of social and political life. Along with education, energy and health, refugees, and migration belong to core areas of BMZ involvement. At the same time, notwithstanding regular bombing and huge numbers of civilian casualties, the German government continues to deport refugees back to Afghanistan. The developmental engagement of BMZ serves here as a bargaining chip, by making the Afghan government accept German policy — even despite the former not being able to provide sufficient help for those deported (Stahlmann 2017). Being involved in a cooperation project on Afghanistan would mean an affiliation with and legitimation of a policy I personally disagree with.

In order to promote more knowledge transfer between academia and politics it is important to take these concerns seriously. It needs willingness on both sides to compromise regarding forms and aims of produced knowledge. It also needs ideas about methods of how academic freedom can get guarantees from its influential partners. It is also crucial that cooperation does not become an instrument for solving financial problems in universities. We need self-confident Central Asian Studies provided with a sufficient amount of funding. And most important, academic relevance should not be measured only by the number of cooperation contracts with foreign policy organizations. But these are wishes for the future. Currently I see cooperation and knowledge transfer merely as an issue between individual scientists and political institutions.

Central Asian Studies and the media covering the region: Shared responsibility

During my bachelor's degree in social sciences in Central Asia, one of my professors would emphasize that research should discuss a very specific social problem surrounding me and offer practical and clear steps to solve it. Bringing debates into existing scientific scholarship was not seen as a legitimate reason for a research inquiry. The labor market was complicit in this idea as well: I could not imagine my

experience and knowledge being relevant anywhere outside of policy-driven development aid projects run by various nongovernmental organizations. Thence, when I saw the call for papers for the CASIO workshop, I was reminded of this rhetoric. However, instead of thinking about justification for existence of any academic work, during the workshop we rather spoke about potential knowledge co-construction with other social and political actors. Thus with regards to the media,[3] one of the most important actors in the public sphere, we discussed some of the following questions: What are the potentials of cooperation between media and academia? Where do the obstacles lie, and what can be done to facilitate communication and exchange practices? These questions are all the more important given that the media not only shapes public opinion but frequently serves as a source of information for political and economic decisions.

Central Asia is continuously represented in fixed and essentializing frameworks in both foreign[4] and local media, sometimes being even treated merely as an extension of Russia and/or China. Images of "Borat," "backward lifestyles," "oppressed women," and "Islamic radicalization" have been the most frequent frames through which the so-called region of dictatorships is constructed — and sometimes also constructs itself internationally. Such images give simplistic answers to complex questions, providing legitimation to various (international) policies aimed at the "development" and "increasing securitization" of the region. Seemingly neutral reports can also be problematic: A prominent example is the notion of the "Silk Road." As the researcher Alexander Morrison has pointed out, the historical legacy of the Silk Road is frequently mentioned in close relation to China's massive "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) initiative, in particular referring to some alleged mutual exchange and benefits all participating parties enjoyed at that time. The OBOR project, criticized for its failure to comply with labor and human rights along with environmental standards, is not aiming to create/facilitate mutual exchange of goods, services, and ideas on equal terms but rather to specifically advance markets for Chinese products in Asia. Thus, according to Morrison, putting the whole initiative in the language of the scientifically inaccurate concept of the Silk Road only obscures our understanding of the project (Morrison 2017). Stronger engagement between the media and academia could help to construct a more accurate picture of the region and provide a better analysis of the processes shaping it.

This discussion is not new and has recently reentered public debates with an article by the photojournalist Andrew Quilty, who focuses on the forced displacement of Afghan families from Pakistan to Afghanistan. In his piece "Working around reductionism in Afghanistan," he provides insights on the ways in which the media functions — especially regarding the coverage of Central Asia. He claims that

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3   By "the media," I mostly refer to the online media and press.
4   I mostly refer here to Northern American and Western European media.

audiences around the globe receive stories written through "outdated reductive lenses that transform complex issues into familiar stereotypes." Apart from stereotyping, the author brings up another important issue too. Recognizing his privileged position as a foreigner in Afghanistan, Quilty points out how local (photo)journalists are struggling to sustain interest in their work, being pushed instead into the role of fixers for foreign journalists. As a result, sometimes local journalists and activists are not recognized as legitimate and equal partners in cooperation, their knowledge and experience are ignored, while the chances for more nuanced media coverage and new topics on the region are consequently reduced as well (Quilty 2017).

It is not new to say that the main obstacle for closer cooperation is a structural one. During the workshop, we approached this inaccurate representation of Central Asia through a role-play facilitated by representatives of the online platform Novastan.org and the media NGO n-ost. In the role-play, participants took the positions of journalists and scholars to discuss articles covering topics such as practices of "bride kidnapping" in Kyrgyzstan, the life of an Afghan graffiti artist in India, and the "problem of extremism" in Central Asia. Although the role-play did not last long, it showed us not only the position of the media but also both the possibilities and limitations of dialogue between the two sides. The most apparent challenge for cooperation is that while the "scholars" in the role-play criticized generalizations and biases in the texts, "journalists" pointed out their working conditions — especially the pressure to produce articles for a broad audience in a short space of time. In turn scholars are reluctant to compress the results of their research into a few sentences, bringing another obstacle for cooperation.

But the challenges for an improvement of cooperation practices also lie deeper on both sides. In the context of journalism on Central Asia, Quilty calls for a general change of attitude in the precarious environment that reward sensationalism and speed. He claims that journalists themselves are first and foremost accountable for the pursuit of critical thinking and independent work, breaking conventions and clichés. However, journalists are not the only ones who have to change their "usual ways." Editors and audiences should also interfere and demand better and more accurate stories (Quilty 2017). Scholars, in turn, are not trained to give short answers to complex issues, making their expert evaluation unjustifiably complicated for journalists. Additionally, within academia, participation in wider societal discussions is often seen as a threat or a compromise of one's "primary identity" as an academic. Especially for early-career scholars, media activism is not considered beneficial for their academic profile.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, there is room for optimism. Mutual construction of knowledge and debate is already taking place, while some scholars of journalism and communications even suggest that academia could help a very specific type of journalism that requires in-depth analysis and investigation of complex ideas — yet

that is communicated in very accessible ways without compromising complexity (Remler et al. 2014). Projects such as the Central Eurasian Scholars and Media Initiative (CESMI) are encouraging increasing collaboration between media, academia, and (local) activists. While during the workshop some of the participants were reluctant to make further steps toward closer cooperation with the media, we shared an awareness that the latter is and can be a powerful channel through which academic works can be made accessible to a wider public for the facilitation of debates — and acknowledged the existence of platforms fit for such exchange.

Conclusion

While the three sections of this report reflect different opinions on the possibilities of knowledge transfer, it is still possible to draw one key point from them all: the purpose of academia is not simply to serve politicians, businessmen, or journalists. Scholars should set their own research agenda, without pressure to sell it. There are several legitimate reasons why scholars would reject engagement in knowledge transfer. One of them is the personal red line of morality, for example when a business endeavor might cause problems for the local communities or damage to the environment — or when development projects, as mentioned in this report, support the deportation of refugees. Another is the fear of institutional dependency: while knowledge transfer could create more awareness of the relevance of Central Asian Studies, it should not be the premise for even receiving funding.

It is important to emphasize that the sometimes defensive tone of this text does not attest to the unwillingness of early-career academics to engage in knowledge transfer as such. It is rather a result of us not quite being seen as an equal partner in the negotiations with the world of politics and economics, as Mariya Petrova argues, as well as the responsibility of conducting independent research that we each all carry. In fact, the workshop clearly showed that among early-career researchers there is an interest in cooperation — but only if this enables us to take on social and political responsibility. The report on journalism thus adds an optimistic note on how closer cooperation could have a positive impact, by reducing clichés about the region.

Even though appropriate ways and methods are yet to be explored, the dialogue with decision makers we had during the workshop encouraged us to pursue this issue further. Similar workshops in the future could help to create platforms for continuous exchange between academia and the "outside," which is the first step toward an improvement of cooperation between Central Asian Studies and politics, business, and media. This is why the workshop focused on scholars at the beginning of their career: as young researchers are less bound by hierarchies and professional responsibilities, they can have a fresh glance at fostering discussion with those outside of academia.

As long as we are working on solutions for the challenges mentioned, we will continue to adhere to what Professor Baldauf recommended during the closing discussion of the workshop. Referring to the work of Central Asian Studies, she said: "We produce knowledge in reserve." Accordingly, we are glad if somebody should use the knowledge that we produce, but we are not willing to merely serve the political or economic interests of others.

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