Call for Participation

“As nothing in science has any value to society if it is not communicated.”
Anne Roe, 1952

As posited by psychologist Anne Roe, the academic community needs to be conscious of their “social obligations.” From the outset and especially since Stuart Hall, critical cultural studies aspire to unearth the constructedness of cultural and social phenomena in order to expose power structures. Moreover, cultural studies informed researchers usually strive to share the findings they obtained with society, hoping to foster emancipatory endeavours.

But how does this aspiration translate into today’s German discourse and the situation of the study of culture in Germany? We are living in times of increasing awareness of the diversification of society and a growing reflection on structural relations of power. We are witnessing huge social and environmental challenges with a progressing sense of urgency, often accompanied by a heavily polarized audience – migration, climate change, and a global health crisis being only three pressing examples. Within academia, the study of culture analyzes these dynamics in its manifold research fields. It offers concepts and tools for critical investigations, produces studies and engages in scholarly debates, thereby discussing, for instance, de- and post-coloniality, gender issues, epistemic violence, migration and the Anthropocene. But how does this theoretical research relate to our social and political reality?

For more than a decade the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen has been at the heart of the study of culture in Germany. That is why it is the right place to take the leap and address these pressing questions in the form of a transdisciplinary workshop.

We will investigate which models and concepts, originating in the study of culture, can be applied beyond the realms of academia and how the results of social and political involvement feed back into scholarly research. In doing so, we aim to rethink the (inter-)dependencies of academic discourse and society, and to find...
ways of how to better bridge the two in an attempted “two-way”-conversation. More specifically, we would like to address the following questions:

- How can critical thinking and critical humanities have a meaningful and sustainable impact on society and politics?
- How to design, shape and communicate research to make a meaningful contribution to society?
- How to open up research and instigate a continuous dialogue with social and political actors?
- How to engage with public discourse in a fruitful way, to maintain academic independence while not being absorbed in one’s efficacy by the status quo?
- How can the experience of practical engagement feed back into and reshape the academic study of culture?
- As scholars of the study of culture, what kind of responsibilities do we bear, inside and outside of academia?

Looking beyond scholarship and academia, the workshop aims to foster a dialogue between scholars and organizations working on the interface of the study of culture and social practice, academic discourse and political action. The invited speakers are from three fields of civil activism:

**Urban Activism – March 9th, 10-11:30 (tbc.):** Jan Buck, raumstation3539 eG, Gießen, and Oliver Hasemann, ZwischenZeitZentrale (ZZZ), Bremen. Oliver Haseman studied urban planning in Dortmund and Aveiro and works as a project manager for the ZZZ. Jan Buck studied Applied Theatre Studies in Gießen, works as a producer and is one of the founders of raumstation3539. Both raumstation3539 and ZZZ operate in the field of urban grassroots activism. This entails re-purposing abandoned urban spaces and utilizing them for sustainable development, artistic and other creative projects, as well as projects aimed at supporting underprivileged communities.

**Consulting – March 10, 11-11:30 (tbc.):** Iris Rajanayagam, xart splitta e.V., Berlin. Xart splitta carries out consulting activities as well as workshops, discussions, conferences, artistic, cultural and other public events centering on intersectionality, anti-discrimination, postcolonial memory, and decoloniality. They attempt to bridge theory and practice and work interdisciplinarily at the intersection of humanities, arts and political practice. Iris Rajanayagam is a historian and responsible for the programme of xart splitta.

**Policy Making – 11 March, 2-3:30:** Natascha Anahita Nassir-Shahnian studied political science in Berlin, Bremen and Helsinki. She is a consultant for diversity development for the Berliner Projektfonds Kulturelle Bildung, a funding instrument financed by the Berlin senate department of culture. Her work focuses on intersectional justice, accessibility and structures of empowerment for marginalized (potential) stakeholder in the sector of arts education. Together with her team she works on institutional and individual methods to transform access and decision-making structures and therefore challenging and changing dominant culture.

**Plenary Discussion – 12 March, 10-12:30 (tbc.)**

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**Application:** The GCSC invites the opening up of new perspectives for the study of culture and inspires new opportunities for how our field of research as well as our individual projects can reach a broader public audience. Finally, we want to provoke a change in society, outside the university and beyond doing a PhD.

The workshop addresses early career researchers who situate their research in the wider field of the study of culture, and who are interested in engaging in a discussion with activists, consultants and policy makers. Please apply by Friday, March 5th, 2020 to building.bridges.GCSC@gmail.com. Places will be limited. We would also like to encourage you to tell us about your interests and why you would like to discuss with us the questions and issues we raised above.

The workshop will take place online over several days. Beginning on March 9 at 10:00 and ending on March 12 at 10:00 with a plenary discussion. Discussion languages will be English and German.

**Contact:** Ruben.pfizenmaier@gcsc.uni-giessen.de, laura.borchert@gcsc.uni-giessen.de and stellamaria.frei@gcsc.uni-giessen.de