



New Europe College, Bucharest
International Workshop
June 8–9, 2020

‘SHADES OF GREY’: INQUIRIES INTO INFORMAL PRACTICES IN THE BLACK SEA REGION SINCE THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

With the emergence of the modern world, ‘formality’ has been gradually turned into the norm of social conduct. ‘Formality’ is embedded into sets of rules and regulations which stand at the basis of social order, but social life continues to have a significant informal component, especially in relation to (state) institutions, which are highly formalized. In the mainstream discourse, ‘formality’ is presented as an emblem of continuity, stability, and civility. ‘Informality’, on the other hand, indicates, especially in public life, unreliability, vulnerability, precariousness, and insecurity, but also creativity and inventiveness.

Using this general framework, we invite applicants to critically and creatively examine the larger Black Sea region (the post-Soviet and Balkan countries) from the perspective of ‘informality’ and the ‘shades of grey’ in which different informal, unrecorded, illegal or even criminal practices, networks, and regulations have coexisted during the past three centuries. We thus aim to shed new light on how changes in the region – with conflicting imperial visions, political changes, state and nation-making, capitalist and socialist modernist projects etc. – influenced both the construction of ‘formality’ and the persistence of ‘informality’.

Candidates may consider a broad variety of topics, including how state actors create norms, territorial enforcement thereof, and the various forms of resistance by individuals and/or groups who continue to use informal networks and practices as a form of survival. Empires, states, borders, rules, institutions, traditions, practices etc. are some of the general topics that can be addressed by anthropologists and political scientists, historians and philologists, artists and sociologists. We are as interested in old and new (social) spaces where the ‘formal’ and the ‘informal’ co-exist (the labor sector or the management of human relations), as well as in perceptions about ‘informality’.

We intend to use the workshop as a platform to test academic interest in ‘formality’ / ‘informality’, with the intention to develop this topic into a more sustainable and extended research program, should participants be interested in such cooperation.

The organizers invite researchers working on relevant topics to submit their proposals for a presentation (20 minutes) during an intensive two-day workshop in Bucharest. Contributions can relate both to more theoretical questions and to case studies relevant for the region.

Proposals for papers (maximum 300 words) and a short (one-page) CV of the applicant should be submitted to cardoleanu@nec.ro no later than 21 March 2020. Applicants will be notified about the result of the selection process by the end of March 2020.

The workshop will be hosted by the New Europe College, an Institute for Advanced Study in Bucharest. The event is organized within the framework of the NEC ‘Pontica Magna’ Fellowship Program (<http://nec.ro/fellowships/pontica-magna/>). The organizers will cover all expenses (international and domestic transport, accommodation, subsistence) and will provide necessary support to participants in getting visas to enter Romania.

The Workshop is funded by VolkswagenStiftung and organized with the assistance of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.