

CHRISTIAN SELLAR RESEARCH INTERESTS

My current research focuses on exploring the boundaries between political and economic geography. I focus particularly on a group of public and private actors that act as intermediaries between state institutions, who are under pressure to adapt to globalization, and firms, whose value chains highly impacted by global and transnational trends. I argue that these actors, including public investment promotion agencies, private location consultants and banks, and semi-private business associations and chambers of commerce, play a role in *both* geopolitics – contributing to fulfilling governments’ economic as well as foreign policy goals – as well as firms’ value chains – providing services to firms’ investments beyond the home country borders. Theoretically, I place my work in the context of the ‘political geography of economic geographies’ (Moisio 2019), based on Moisio’s argument that geopolitics concerns the ‘production of territories of wealth, power and belonging’ (ibid.) and Mazzucato’s notion of an ‘entrepreneurial state’ that frames firms’ investment opportunities and pathways of innovation (2013). Empirically, I focus on Italian state agencies and consultancies operating in Central Eastern Europe as well as China.

My work builds on earlier research on industrial restructuring in a broader context of institutional changes and the democratization of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe at different scales. Particularly, ‘democratization’ at the local level reflects how public and private sectors engage with each other. Second, how foreign investment is progressively integrated into the local area is related to both transparency and the efficiency of local law enforcement and investors’ capabilities and their willingness to comply with the local laws and unspoken norms. I understand changes at the local level as shaped by the consolidation of national-level democratic institutions and regulations of the market economy. At the supra-national level, I analyzed the European Union affecting both national-level reforms – through its requirement of compliance with EU norms – and development at the local level – through EU funded grants. These changes, led by the bureaucratic mechanisms of EU enlargement, are intertwined with trust-based decisions in the private sector.

Since the award of tenure in 2014, my publications have evolved from focusing on the political economy of specific locales in Central and Eastern Europe to larger questions about the influence of firms on the organizational structure of governments. My 2014 paper “Building a transnational fusion bureaucracy? A study of state officials and opinion leaders in Rousse (Bulgaria) and Transcarpathia (Ukraine)” published in *Geopolitics*, represents a transition from my earlier focus on the integration of foreign investors in local communities to broader questions of institutional change. The paper discussed some of those transformations in two medium-sized regional economies, one within the European Union, the other immediately outside its borders, arguing that similar processes were occurring, albeit with less intensity outside the EU. My next paper, co-authored with Rudolf Pastor, “Mutating neoliberalism: the promotion of Italian investors in Slovakia before and after the global financial crisis,” (Sellar and Pastor 2015), published in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* begins tackling the question of the mutual relations between firms and institutional change by looking at the position of intermediaries between the Slovak state and Italian firms at multiple scales, including national actors operating in the capital city of Bratislava and actors operating in one small urban economy. Subsequently, “The transnational investment promotion community between Italy and China: an example of post-Washington Consensus neoliberalism, (Lan, et al, 2016), published

in *J-Reading. Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography* expanded the spatial reach of my research, following the globalization of Italian firms beyond Europe to Asia. In so doing, we showed how intermediaries play a role in supporting the bilateral flows of investments between Italy and China, while also organizing politically the community of Italian firms to enable access to otherwise difficult-to-reach Chinese local authorities. As a venue for this paper, we chose an Italian journal as a way to give back to the community that supported our research.

For the next paper, “The geo-economics/politics of Italy’s investment promotion community” (Sellar et al. 2017), published in *Geopolitics*, my co-authors and I returned to Italy to analyze the historical and legal processes that led to the establishment of public and private intermediaries since the 1990s. Because of those processes, intermediaries have a specific network configuration which we call an “investment promotion community” (IPC). A further single-authored paper, “Transnationalizing bureaucracies through investment promotion: the case of Informest” published in *Environment and Planning C*, furthered the theorization of IPCs, arguing that Bourdieu’s notion of field is an effective tool to study the transnationalization of national and local bureaucracies, as driven by the goal to support firms’ beyond national boundaries. In 2019, I published my first edited book, titled *Geofinance between Political and Financial Geographies: A Focus on the Semi-Periphery of the Global Financial System* (Grandi ed al. 2019). Besides collecting the work of scholars from areas under-represented in financial geography, the book develops a theoretical argument to highlight the role of financial institutions in framing and supporting governments’ political decisions concerning firms’ internationalization. My latest work to date is a review forum dedicated to Sami Moisio’s book *Geopolitics of the Knowledge-Based Economy* (Sellar et al. 2020), in which my co-authors and I friendly critique Sami’s work to encourage geographers to be more assertive in reclaiming the spaces of political economy. Besides these major works, I produced a variety of working papers, conference proceedings, and book reviews, all aimed at further exploring the political geography of economic geographies.

Alongside my work, I have been attentive to grow as an academic leader, guiding the work of colleagues and junior scholars through the editorial work for the book and the review forum. My current works in progress continue the efforts to lead in my chosen research area while branching in new directions. I currently have a book under contract with Springer Nature titled *Geopolitical Perspectives from the Italian Border*, in which I will translate from Italian and explain to an Anglo American audience the highly unconventional views on the relationships between political and economic systems of the Italian scholar Gianfranco Battisti. The book is due to the publisher in April 2021. Besides the book, I am co-authoring a paper with two colleagues from the business school, titled “Whole country of origin network development abroad.” The paper is now in its fifth round of revisions in *the Journal of International Business Studies*, the top journal in international business. The goal of this paper is to present my data on governmental and private support of firms abroad to a management audience, arguing that consultants, banks, and consulates constitute whole networks that provide a thus-far unexplored form of governance to clusters of (Italian) firms abroad.