

## CHRISTIAN SELLAR RESEARCH INTERESTS

My current research focuses on questioning established 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 are increasingly global. 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 the restructuring of governments to project economic influence beyond borders – as well as firms’ value chains – providing services to firms’ investments beyond the home country borders. Theoretically, on one hand I contribute to discussions about the role of the state in global value chains (GVC), arguing that changes in value chains are part of larger political transformations (Gereffi 2014, Pickles et al. 2016); on the other hand I contribute to political geographers’ discussions about geo-economics, by pointing to the indirect and direct role of firms in changing state territoriality. 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 local level reflects the ways in which public and private sectors engage with each other. Second, the ways in which 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.

Over the years, my publications have evolved from focusing on clusters and industrial districts in Central and Eastern Europe within the broader processes of Europeanization to larger questions about the influence of firms on the organizational structure of governments. For example, the article, *Breaking Anglo American Hegemony: An Italian success story?* (C. Sellar, 2009) published in *Est-Ovest*, outlined the evolution of scholarship on the relationship between the public sector and economic actors at the regional level and examined how Italian scholars contributed to debates in Anglo American geography. The paper, *From ‘Exotic’ to ‘Familiar’ Italian Textile and Clothing Firms and the Shifting Perception of Eastern Europe*, (C. Sellar, 2009) published in the *Journal of Cultural Geography* looked specifically at Italian entrepreneurs outsourcing to Central and Eastern Europe, discussed the transformative role of outsourcing on economies and societies in specific regions. The paper I co-authored with colleagues from Bulgaria and the U.S., *Cluster Policies in Bulgaria: European integration, post socialist dynamics, and local level initiatives*, (C. Sellar, M. Emilova, C. Petkova, K. McNeil, 2011) in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* compliments the previous paper by analyzing how a specific economic policy adopted by the European Union transformed economies and societies in Bulgaria, while being adapted by local officials to local needs. The article *Europeanizing Timisoara: neoliberal reforms, continuity with the past, and unexpected*

side effects, (C. Sellar, 2011) published by *GeoJournal*, attempted to theorize the dynamic relationship between policies and firms in one specific region in Romania.

The paper I coauthored with Laurel McEwen, A cosmopolitan analysis of the contradictions in EU Regional and Enlargement policies as drivers of Europeanization, (C. Sellar, L. McEwen, 2011) published in *European Urban and Regional Studies*, began the next step of my research project, analyzing how state officials at all scales manipulate EU policies to their advantage, leading to unexpected institutional and social transformations in Europe. In the following paper, Building a transnational fusion bureaucracy? A study of state officials and opinion leaders in Rouse (Bulgaria) and Transcarpathia (Ukraine), (C. Sellar, 2014), published in *Geopolitics* I 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. While these two papers represented a transition from the earlier focus on clusters to broader questions of institutional change, the paper I co-authored with Rudolf Pastor, Mutating neoliberalism: the promotion of Italian investors in Slovakia before and after the global financial crisis, (C. Sellar, R. 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, (T. Lan, C. Sellar, S. Cheng, 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. In our latest paper, “The geo-economics/politics of Italy’s investment promotion community” (C. Sellar, T. Lan, U. Poli, 2017), published in *Geopolitics*, my co-authors and I returned to Italy to analyse the historical and legal processes that led to the establishment of public and private intermediaries in Italy (IPCs) since the 1990s. Because of those processes, these actors have a specific network configuration which we call an “investment promotion community” (IPC).

Research in preparation includes a theoretical discussion of IPCs in the context of Bourdieu’s field theory with the paper “Transnationalizing bureaucracies through investment promotion: the case of Informest” currently in revision for resubmission to *Environment and Planning C*, the work with John Berns “The Best of Both Worlds: How Home and Host Country Institutions Are Leveraged by Investment Promotion Communities” aims at presenting the notion of IPC to management scholars, and the paper “Blind spots in value chains research’s conceptual treatments of the State” in which I discuss the limitation deriving from value chains research approaching the notion of State without a strong dialogue with political geography.

My future research will involve both archival work – aimed at exploring the origin of public agencies supporting firms’ export in 1920s Italy, as well as an NSF grant proposal aimed at comparing how Italian and German intermediaries support firms’ internationalization differently.