Transdisciplinary Research on Identities and Cultures

Keywords: gender studies, literary studies, cultural history, digital humanities, Slovenian culture, identities, intersectionality, analysis of power relations

ERC Area: SH 5 Cultures and Cultural Production, Sub-area: SH 6 Study of Human History

I. CONTENT OUTLINE

Summary of the Research Program

This transdisciplinary research program on identities and cultures explores Slovenian culture and identity within the broader Central European and Balkan context, challenging dominant narratives and offering a more inclusive, comparative perspective. It employs a critical and intersectional approach to examine how identities—understood as fluid and shaped by practices, values, and social interactions—are formed, transformed, or challenged within historical and cultural contexts. These identities are examined through the lens of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, disability, age, migration, and other social categories, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of marginalized groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and the socially excluded. Culture is examined as intellectual and artistic expression—including literature, film, and the media—as well as everyday community practices that shape relationships between individuals and their environment. The program covers key historical periods, ranging from the development of secular culture after 1848, through the modern and interwar periods and socialism, to the post-transition era. Its main objectives include uncovering changes in the formation of identity and the role of culture in social change, analyzing power relations in cultural expressions, and identifying practices of resistance against oppression.

Methodologically, the program is based on literary approaches (close reading and tools of the digital humanities, such as stylometry and text corpora, for the study of cultural and literary artifacts) as well as cultural studies and historical approaches. It also explores on exploring the role of emotions in Slovenian literary and cultural production. It draws on a postmodern spatial paradigm that emphasizes openness, relationality, and historical diversity. It incorporates participatory research methods, including citizen science, and maintains strong ties to contemporary social movements such as feminism, environmentalism, anarchism, and decolonial activism, all of which critique existing political, social, and cultural structures. Through microhistorical analysis of individuals, communities, and events, the program sheds light on broader social processes and cultural transformations. An important goal of the research program is to reveal the contributions of marginalized voices, offer new understandings of cultural history and identities, and produce open, publicly accessible scholarly work that connects the past and the present through diverse and inclusive analytical frameworks. By combining gender studies, literary approaches, historiography, media studies, digital technologies, and social criticism, the proposed research program not only enriches academic discourse but also broadens a public understanding of cultural diversity, historical complexity, and identity politics in Slovenia and beyond.

Short description

The transdisciplinary research program on identities and cultures aims to explore Slovenian culture and identity within the broader Central European and Balkan context, challenging dominant narratives and offering a broader, comparative perspective. It employs a critical and intersectional approach that examines how identities—understood as fluid and shaped by practices, values, and social interactions—are formed, transformed, or contested in historical and cultural contexts. These identities are examined from the perspectives of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, disability, age, migration, and other social categories, with a particular focus on the experiences of marginalized groups such as women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and the socially excluded. Culture is studied as intellectual and artistic expression—including literature, film, and media—as well as everyday community practices that shape the relationships between individuals and their environment. The program covers key historical periods, from the development of secular culture after 1848, through modernity and the interwar period, to socialism and the post-reunification period. Key objectives include uncovering changes in identity formation and the role of culture in social change, analyzing power relations in cultural expressions, and identifying practices of resistance to oppression.

Methodologically, the program draws on literary approaches (close reading and digital humanities tools such as stylometry and text corpora to explore cultural and literary artifacts) as well as cultural-historical approaches. It also focuses on researching the role of emotions in Slovenian literary and cultural production. It draws on the postmodern spatial paradigm, which emphasizes openness, relationality, and historical diversity. It incorporates participatory research methods, including citizen science, and maintains close ties to contemporary social movements such as feminism, environmentalism, anarchism, and decolonial activism—all of which critique existing political, social, and cultural structures. Through microhistorical analysis of individuals, communities, and events, the program sheds light on broader social processes and cultural transformations. A key aim of the research program is to highlight the contribution of marginalized voices, offer a new understanding of cultural history and identity, and create open, publicly accessible scholarly work that connects the past and the present through diverse and inclusive frameworks of analysis. By combining gender studies, literary approaches, historiography, media studies, digital technologies, and social criticism, the proposed research program not only enriches academic discourse but also contributes to a broader public understanding of cultural diversity, historical complexity, and identity politics in Slovenia and beyond.

Theoretical Foundations, Research Content, and Objectives

The research group's work is grounded in the recognition that new research approaches developed in literary studies, cultural history, and cultural studies enable groundbreaking studies that have not yet been systematically addressed but are crucial for understanding phenomena outside the frameworks of dominant cultures. Research conducted to date by members of the program group has shown that including Slovenian culture in comparative

studies calls into question the belief that hegemonic cultures can be understood as representative of the broader space in which they emerge. In this sense, the program group's research focuses not only on cultural artifacts (primarily literature and new media) but also on beliefs, emotions, ideas, and values.

The research program stems from the recognition that we must study Slovenian culture as part of the Central European cultural space. We understand the latter as a space based on a vibrant exchange of ideas and on a shared sense of belonging to certain common historical events and similarities in social and cultural development, while taking into account the fact that the period from the end of World War I to Slovenia's independence is also closely linked to the Balkan region. The Slovenian ethnic space—which we understand as the territory of today's Republic of Slovenia and the areas where Slovenian minorities live—has always been a crossroads and meeting point of various cultures; however, with the formation of nations, it has also become a space of tension, and therefore only a comparative approach allows for an in-depth and broad understanding of the phenomena that this region generates. Research must therefore take into account the coexistence of different cultures while simultaneously focusing on the specific aspects of the development of Slovenian identity and culture across historical periods, as explained in greater detail in the program description.

We understand identities as a composite of an individual's self-understanding and connections to the group to which they belong; they are dynamic and ever-changing, as they are constantly shaped through practices, values, and interpersonal communication.

In our research, we also take into account disadvantaged groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, socially and economically marginalized individuals, and children.

We examine everyday practices and rituals through an intersectional lens, taking into account social dimensions such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, "race"/ethnicity, disability, class, age, spatial context, and migrant status. Our interests also encompass broader conceptual frameworks, such as power, ideology, intimacy, the body, and emotions.

We understand culture in terms of the duality of its definition: we understand it as works and gestures that, within a given society, transcend the economic or symbolic necessities of everyday life and are subject to aesthetic or intellectual judgment, and as practices through which any community acts and reflects on its relationships to the world, to others, or to itself. Following the first meaning, we research, historically contextualize, and define artifacts, focusing primarily on literary works, film, and new media; in the second sense, we investigate historically transmitted patterns of meaning, embodied in symbolic forms, through which people communicate, preserve, and develop their knowledge of life and their relationship to it, as well as various practices and reactions to it.

Contents:

In a temporal sense, we consider the following periods as the starting point for our research: the period after 1848 as constitutive for the development of secular culture; the modern era as a period in which significant transformations occur in the understanding and constitution of gender identities, as well as a paradigm shift from the nation-building role of culture to its artistic role; the period between the beginning and end of the world wars as a time of societal modernization and confrontation with totalitarian regimes; the period of socialism, during which a transformation of social roles occurs once again. We understand the post-transition era as a period in which we also critically define and analyze contemporary phenomena and practices, examining them from a historical perspective.

In our research on identity, we draw on an intersectional approach and take into account multifaceted identities—gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, class, age, migration, etc. We investigate how individual or group identities are formed, transformed, reinforced, or challenged within a specific social, cultural, and historical context.

The topics we explore in the field of culture encompass literature and its various genres, art, language, media, everyday practices, cultural heritage, and various forms of symbolic expression and identity dynamics. In literary studies, among other things, we explore the concept of voice as an effect of the text that arises from the expression of a particular subjectivity and, thereby, identity.

Objectives

- To investigate how the key concepts addressed by the program group are situated within historical periods and how the relationships between those in power and those subordinate to them are reflected in them.
- To understand and reveal the factors that influence the transformation of identity positions.
- To reveal practices of resistance against oppression and the restriction on freedom in the realm of identities and cultures.
- To identify literary devices in works that address themes related to diverse identities, using, on the one hand, close reading as an in-depth examination of selected case studies and, on the other hand, methods of digital text analysis.
- To offer insights into the connections between identities, space, and narrative perspectives in literature, film, and new media from the perspective of the spatial paradigm.
- To examine the dynamics of emotions in Slovenian literature in a comparative context, analyzing their subject, object, mediation, and expression, as well as the poetics and politics of emotions.
- To implement digital humanities approaches to the program group's research and to develop the electronic collection Pisma.
- To highlight the contributions of marginalized groups to the development of Slovenian culture and society.

Anticipated Basic Research Methods

The central aspect of our research is critical, as we focus on analytical approaches that examine and challenge systems of social inequality, power structures, ideological frameworks, gender and sexual norms, and marginalization.

A transdisciplinary approach is key here, as it enables the interweaving of science and artistic practices as well as participatory research (citizen science), offering a different perspective and transcending the limitations characteristic of monodisciplinary research.

Methodologically, we embrace the pluralism of diverse approaches that have emerged in literary studies, history, and cultural studies, while drawing particularly heavily on the digital humanities, which play an increasingly important role in the contemporary research on literature and other cultural phenomena. Key topics include data analysis, computational stylometry, and the promotion of open access to knowledge through digital resources; therefore, we actively participate in the creation of electronic databases and text collections (SHE WROTE, ELTech). Of particular importance to the RCH is the PISMA collection, which was developed by a project team at the RCH. The current PISMA collection contains 2,020 letters from the period between 1878 and 1946. It gives users free access to the intimate correspondence of numerous individuals from a time when letters were an important means of communication. The inclusion of letters in the collection is not determined by whether the letter was written by an ordinary person or a well-known figure, but rather by how the letter can be used to understand personal experiences of intimate events in individuals' lives and key historical moments. The collection facilitates a wide range of cultural-historical research and is freely accessible as an open-access corpus for digital humanities research.

Our research is grounded in the spatial paradigm of postmodern humanities, characterized by openness, incompleteness, relational connectivity, heterarchy, and multidimensionality of time—concepts we link to digital humanities in terms of mapping and visualizing spatial relationships.

Using various humanistic approaches, we also explore the development of contemporary social movements, such as environmentalism, feminism, anarchism, decolonial activism, and other initiatives that challenge dominant social, political, and cultural structures.

We also draw on the concept of embodied history, which involves exploring how the human body has shaped and reflected cultural history: how people have thought about the body, how they have moved, and how they have treated their own and others' bodies. At the same time, it focuses on how bodily practices and conceptions of the body have shaped political, social, economic, and cultural changes over time. In addition to other historical approaches, we draw on the principles of microhistory, which focuses on the detailed study of smaller units, such as individual events, local communities, individuals, or settlements. Through these limited cases, microhistory explores broader and more complex issues, and it is also closely linked to the fields of social and cultural history.

Significance for the Development of Science

The research conducted within the program will enable new understandings of social phenomena in the Slovenian context, as we will approach them using methods that have so far been employed to a limited extent and within the framework of different research questions. The research will yield discoveries that will transform existing knowledge about identities and cultures in the region under study and during the selected time periods. The comparative and intersectional nature of the program itself will facilitate collaboration with research conducted by other project groups that study these topics in cultural contexts different from but related to the Slovenian one, thereby enabling the transfer of knowledge to other settings (both academic and non-academic).

Significance for the Socioeconomic and Cultural Development of Slovenia

Identities and cultures that run counter to the dominant ones are always subject to various attempts to subjugate them and restrict their freedom. The program group's new findings, which will be presented to the broader public through dialogue, therefore offer starting points for understanding and reflecting on relationships between dominant and subordinated groups, thereby helping to raise awareness of practices of subjugation and exclusion and their consequences. By communicating its research findings in connection with literature and other arts, the program group will contribute to a new understanding of cultural phenomena and offer an opportunity to reflect on revising the current situation, thereby contributing to a more democratic and inclusive society.