

Laboratories or worldmakers? What are the Balkans in and for International Studies?

Friday, 20 June 2025 09:00 (1h 30m)

The Balkan peninsula has long been of interest to International Relations scholars, perceived as turbulent, fragmented lands where some of the world's most pressing problems can be observed; Europe's 'other' (Todorova 1997); and an interesting case study through which different International Relations theories can be tested. At the level of international law and policy, the Balkans have for the longest time been 'a site of experimentation' (Tzouvala 2014) of new techniques, models and projects. To illustrate, the former Yugoslavia was the first one to be subject to an UN Security Council-established ad-hoc international criminal tribunal and has since become one of the main 'recipients' of the global transitional justice project; a justice 'laboratory'. Yet, more recently, scholars from the Balkans have sought to amend some of these epistemic injustices and alleviate some of the epistemic violence by, among others, highlighting the agency of Balkan people as epistemic subjects and not merely epistemic objects, and the Balkans as a site of theory building and not merely theory testing in International Relations (Kušić 2021; Stavrevska et al. 2023).

This roundtable gathers Balkan scholars across career stages, theoretical and methodological approaches, geographical locations and ethnicities, to reflect on the place and the role of the Balkans in the past 50 years of International Relations scholarship. The panellists will discuss what the Balkans have been in and for International Relations in the past decades, reflecting on major 'trends', 'debates' and 'turns' in the scholarship and drawing on examples, anecdotes and illustrations from their research and professional experiences. In line with the conference theme, the panellists will also discuss potential new and improved research avenues, imagining what the Balkans could be for International Relations of the future.

Track Classification: South East Europe Working Group