Researching the Transnational vs. Transnationalizing the Research? Towards a Methodological Turn

Catharina I. Keßler & Simona Szakács Behling
Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
& Georg-Eckert-Institut Leibniz Institut für Internationale
Schulbuchforschung
Braunschweig

globalDAS 8-minute film TAKE 1

THE FILM @ globaldas.gei.de
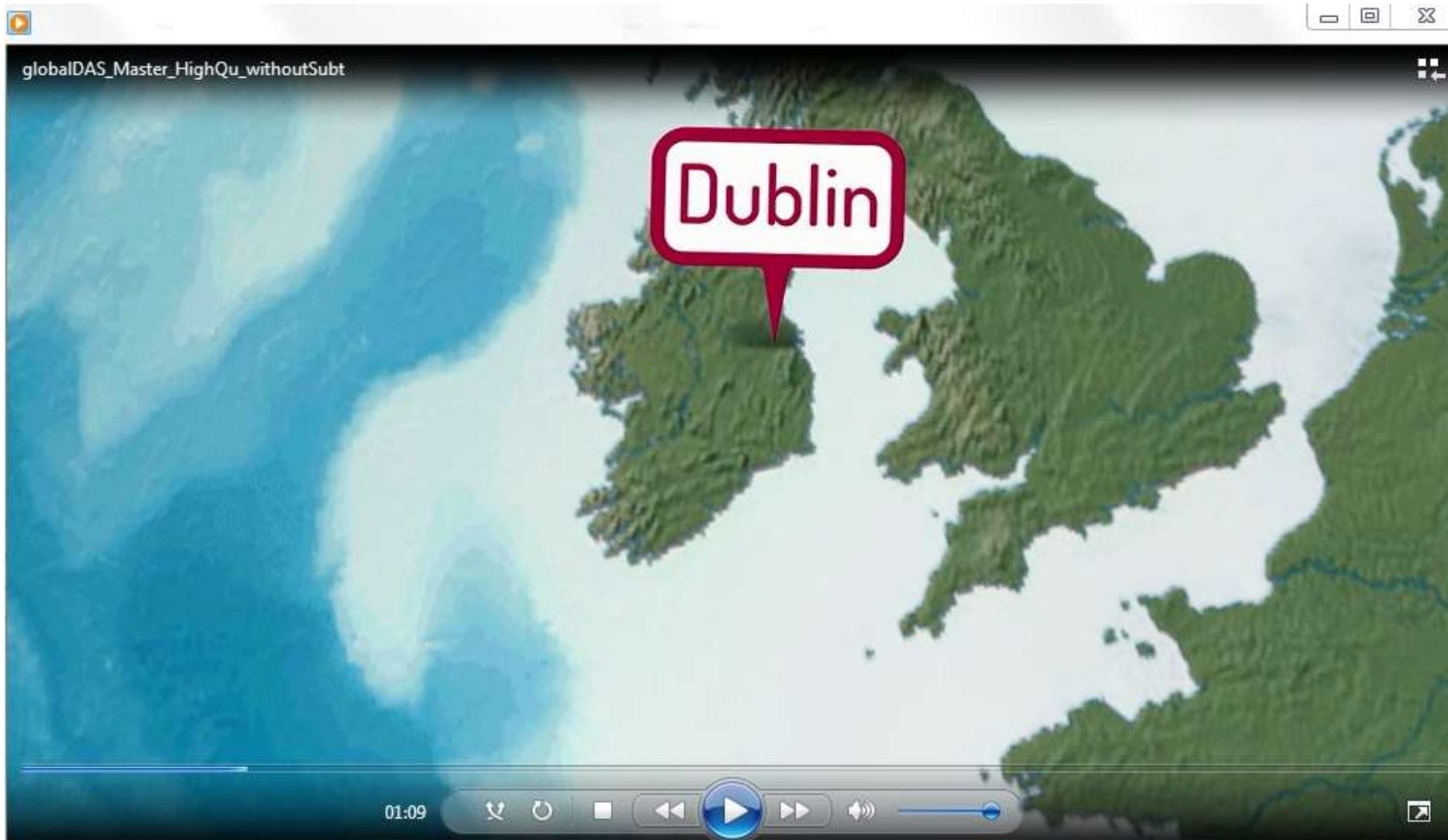
globalDAS 8-minute film TAKE 2

(see Amelina & Faist 2012; Dale & Robertson 2009; Beck & Sznaider 2006; Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002; Hannerz 1996; Marcus 1995; Wolf 1982 etc.)

selective porousness (Levitt & de la Dehesa 2018)

DIGITAL ART MUSEUM: teamLab Borderless opened in June 2018 in Odaiba, Tokyo.

Artwork: Universe of Water Particles on a Rock where People Gather

The agenda

"[...] assume a world that is **transnationally** constituted" (Khagram & Levitt, 2008:33)

- 'Transnational Studies' (TS): **empirical**, **methodological**, **theoretical**, **philosophical** & **public** transnationalism**S** (Khagram & Levitt 2008)

- <u>**Methodological**</u> transnationalism: questions of design, data collection, units of inquiry, levels of analysis, time-frames

Methodological transnationalism

Research Design:

- Space & Time: multiplicity, complexity & entanglement(s) (cf. Khagram & Levitt 2007; Amelina et al 2012)

Pending problems:

- Differentiating transnational, global, comparative perspectives (Pries 2008)
- Defining unit**s** of analysis and unit**s** of reference/context (Pries 2008; Amelina et al 2012)

The "transnational social space"

- <u>Units of reference</u> in TS = transnational societal units characterized by **durability** and **density of exchange** (cf. Pries 2008)- e.g. transnational families, companies, organisations...

3 structuring aspects:

- Practices
- Symbols
- Artefacts

intensive!

stable!

cross-border!

Focus on **FLOWS!**

FIG. 1.—Pluri-scalar governance of education   (Dale & Robertson 2009)

"are we there yet?"

Researching the transnational
*in education

- **Governance & structures of education**: governing by numbers, role of IO's (OECD, World Bank, UNESCO), public vs private; de-territorialized authority & control

- **Content & discourses of education**: world culture debates; convergence & divergence; hybridization; travelling policies & ideals, norms; legitimization;

- **Forms & types of education**: diversification of school types; internationalization; IB/international education

- **The education of trans-migrant individuals**: cultural diversity; *Migrationsgesellschaft*, transnational social spaces, relationships, diasporas, identities & values.

Ongoing dissatisfaction(s)…

- Schools (and what goes on in them!) still largely researched and conceptualized in 'national container logic' / 1 element per box

- BUT: What happens in the classroom is not more exclusively 'national' than what happens in other societal institutions, and it's equally 'messy'/'entangled'

- What makes **schools** increasingly transnational…?

Schools as…

Meeting points between *differently located*:

- **Actors** (teachers, students, administrators, inspectors etc.)
- **(Infra/)Structures** (organisational, financial, technological etc.)
- **Practices** (classroom, projects, extra-curriculars, everyday /digitally-mediated interactions etc.)
- **Symbols** (ideologies, educational models, school ethos, imaginaries, etc.)
- **Artefacts** (educational media, curricula, regulations, material objects etc.)

The Design of globalDAS

Multi-sited field work at several DAS around the world
How is GCE appropriated (pluri-)locally?

Ethnographic, multi-method research strategy

Multi-level, multi-actor: Reveal pluri-vocality of seemingly univocal aspects

Consistent, yet open research agenda

**Data collection and interpretation by multi(trans)disciplinary research team
critically reflexive 'translation' processes**

**Communication, Collaboration, Critical Creativity
→ follow flows – identify the 'knots' (quasi parallel field research)
→ role of digital technologies in the field and in analysis**

Multi-phased focused ethnography → returning to the field

Empirical Reflections

Two examples

- one extra-curricular practice: Christmas

- one classroom practice: Junior Wahl

When 'the national' is the *explanandum,* **not the** *explanans:*

What do we see differently or for the first time?

Empirical Reflections – Christmas

- Christmas decorations & practices in most DAS observed: advent reefs, Christmas trees etc. & German Christmas markets

- How is this appropriated pluri-locally?

St. Kilian's
German School

Beverly Hills Cairo
German School

German International School
of Silicon Valley

Deutsche Internationale
Schule Johannesburg

German School
Seoul International

Deutsche Schule
Instituto Ballester
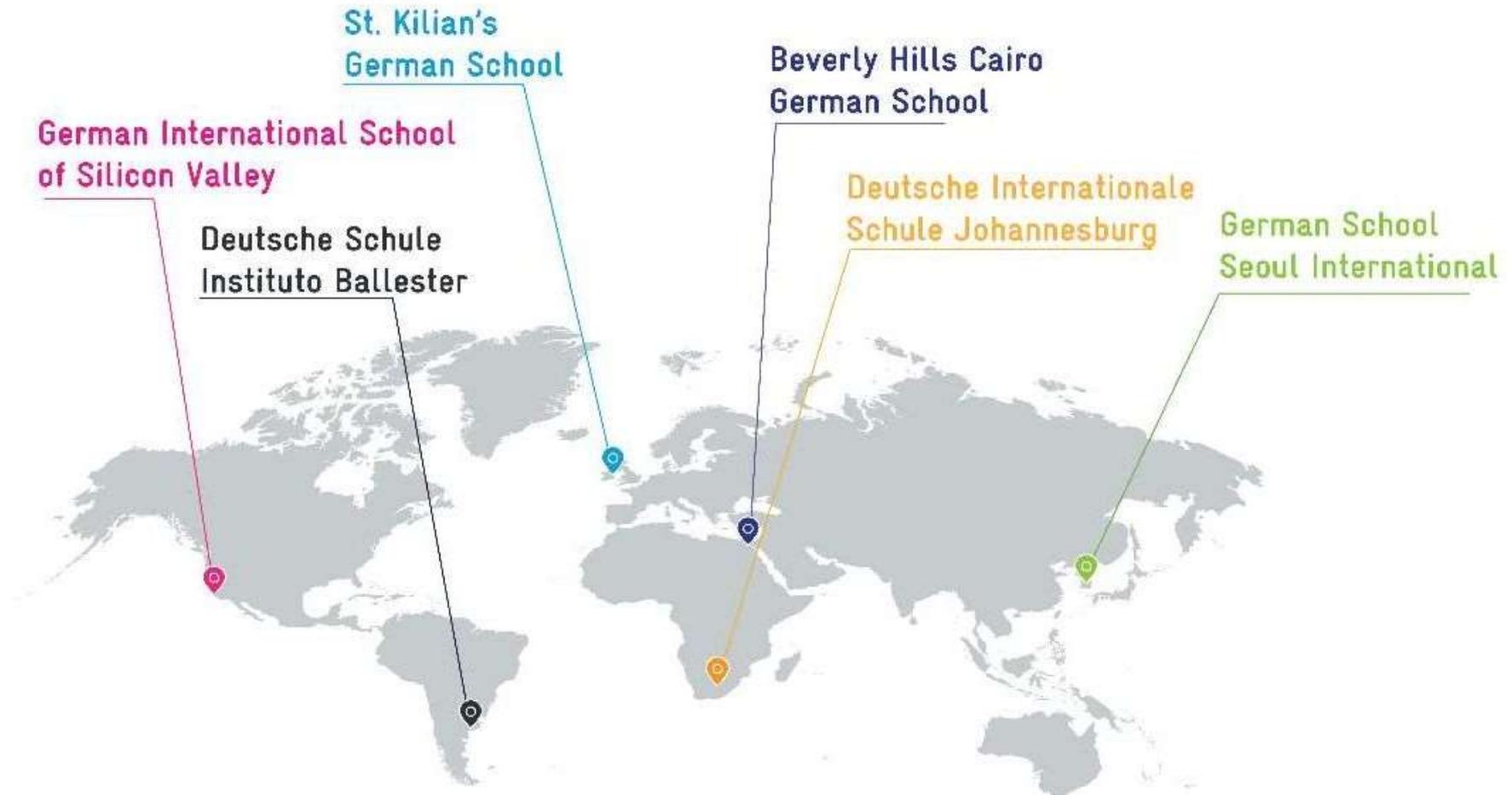
Invoking national or religious codes? Border/boundary work!

- School festivities often made relevant as *national* customs in the school calendar, i.e. Korean Chuseok
  → intercultural learning vs. enforcement of binary codes
- Custom of extensive decorative Christmas artefacts, symbols and practice of decorating not wholly & explicitly marked as part of a certain nationally framed culture, but arbitrariness/openness…

Contingency & Multiperspectivity

- Ex. of religious study teacher: construction of people of same faith coming together
- Ex. of parents' association: parents sharing experience of having lived in Germany; notion of „home in Germany" (also transnational understanding of home.s)
- contrast with other DAS show that this can be different in schools where school community is not primarily Christian, f. ex. Beverly Hills Cairo

German School Seoul International

DEUTSCHE SCHULE SEO

School Ethos & Identity Making/Navigation

- (German) Christmas markets = occasions for visits between members of different school abroad (inter-national; inter-cultural exchange + strong sense of being expats)
- Christmas card writing to school in Germany (national + inter-national)

German Christmas Market & Global City Seoul

- Rare occasion that school is open to general public; strong idea of inside-outside ("bubble")
- German Christmas market = crowd magnet
- South Korean TV reporting: part of Seoul's ongoing narrative staking claim to being one of the world's top global cities

→ drawing on one 'national' to support image of being global which then reinforces another 'national'; negotiation of the national

Beverly Hills Cairo
German School

Deutsche Internationale
Schule Johannesburg

German School
Seoul International

Beverly Hills Cairo German School

Ko𝄢ary
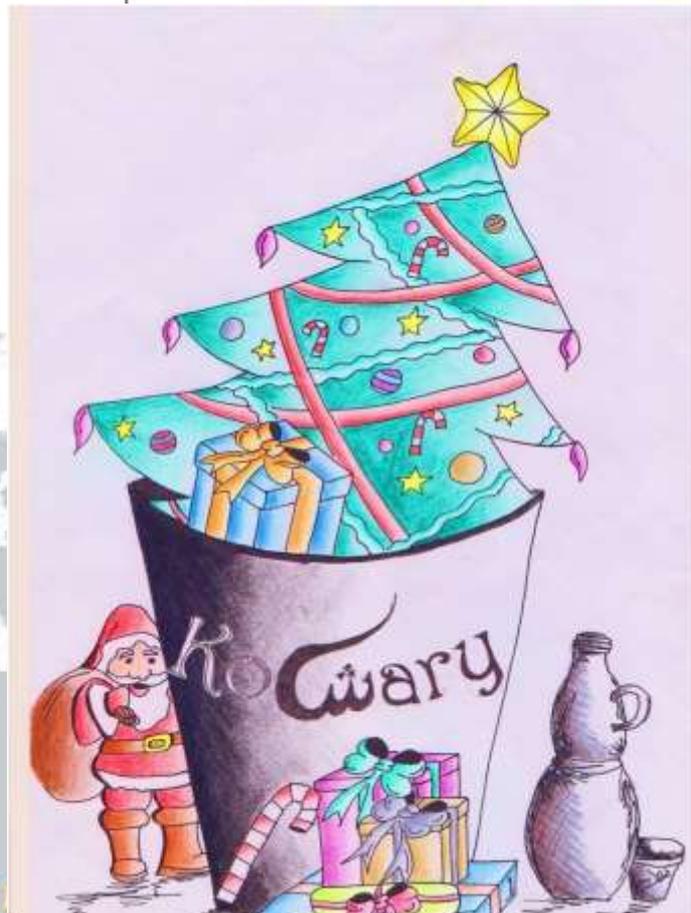
Creative Identity Work?
Creative Remixing of Codes

- cover picture of December issue of 2015 students' newspaper
- different cultural? codes, symbols and knowledge
- decorated Christmas tree in a pot with the name of a typical Egyptian dish, "Koshari"
- Koshari is largely written in Latin letters, albeit the Arabic letter "shin" (ش) = creative mix of Arabic and Latin scripts
- While it uses 'stereotypical' imagery, its decoding requires certain knowledge or membership
- What are the codes? Blurring of religious, cultural, regional, national
- Also: questions of representation! Are we representing these practices as combinations, hybrids, remixings or something else entirely?!
- Similar creative work at DSSI

Empirical Reflections – Junior Wahl

- non-party, not-for-profit initiative in Berlin provides material
- lessons, student organised activities, party posters, simulated election parallel to German elections
- 'traveling practices, artefacts and symbols' with partly very different (additional) meanings,
  ex. of Deutsche Schule Instituto Ballester in Buenos Aires

St. Kilian's
German School

Beverly Hills Cairo
German School

German International School
of Silicon Valley

Deutsche Internationale
Schule Johannesburg

German School
Seoul International

Deutsche Schule
Instituto Ballester

Decoupling from the national?

"On Wednesday, September 20, the GISSV Mountain View students from grade 6 to 12 had the opportunity to partake in the Junior Voting Day that takes place every four years. The Junior Voting is a simulation of the Voting Process for the German election that German schools worldwide participate in" (student article on *homepage* of German International School of Silicon Valley)

→ 'universal' referral to democratic participation and abstract 'political thinking', decoupled from local/national/German context

→ associations of a German election simulation at DAS almost taken for granted

→ text goes on explaining German context and how votes are relevant as feedback for German politicians (explicit markings necessary!)

Ex. poster with CDU slogan "*Für ein Deutschland, in dem wir gut und gerne leben*"

→ one of several CDU slogans that was put on a poster; paradox of (future) lifeworlds

→ Learning democratic processes in focus

German International School of Silicon Valley

Deutsche Schule
Instituto Ballester

Translations into students' lifeworld
- Parallel voting for student parliament
- Even more 'necessary' here than in Silicon Valley regarding the student population consisting in large part of non-expat Egyptian children?

Beverly Hills Cairo
German School

News reportings by German TV, radio stations and newspaper – DAS as beacon of political participation within Egypt. Constructing boundaries

„**Seltene Demokratiemomente in Ägypten**
[…] Es gibt Wahlnacht-Veranstaltungen in der deutschen Botschaft und im Goethe-Institut, eine intensive Auseinandersetzung mit dem deutschen Wahl- und Parteiensystem, den Spitzenkandidaten und den Parteiprogrammen findet vor allem an mehreren deutschen Auslandsschulen in Ägypten statt, die auch bei ägyptischen Familien sehr gefragt sind. Im Zuge der Juniorwahlen simulieren etwa die Schüler der Deutschen Schule Beverly Hills Kairo die Bundestagswahl. Sie haben Wahlkabinen in den Farben der Deutschlandflagge gebaut, Wahllokale eingerichtet, Wahlzettel und -urnen bereitgestellt. Um sich zu informieren haben die Schüler Steckbriefe der Parteien erarbeitet und den Wahl-O-Mat genutzt. Gewählt wird an der Schule am Mittwoch. So viel Demokratie(-erziehung) ist in Ägypten selten" (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 21.09.17).

Junior Wahl – The Results
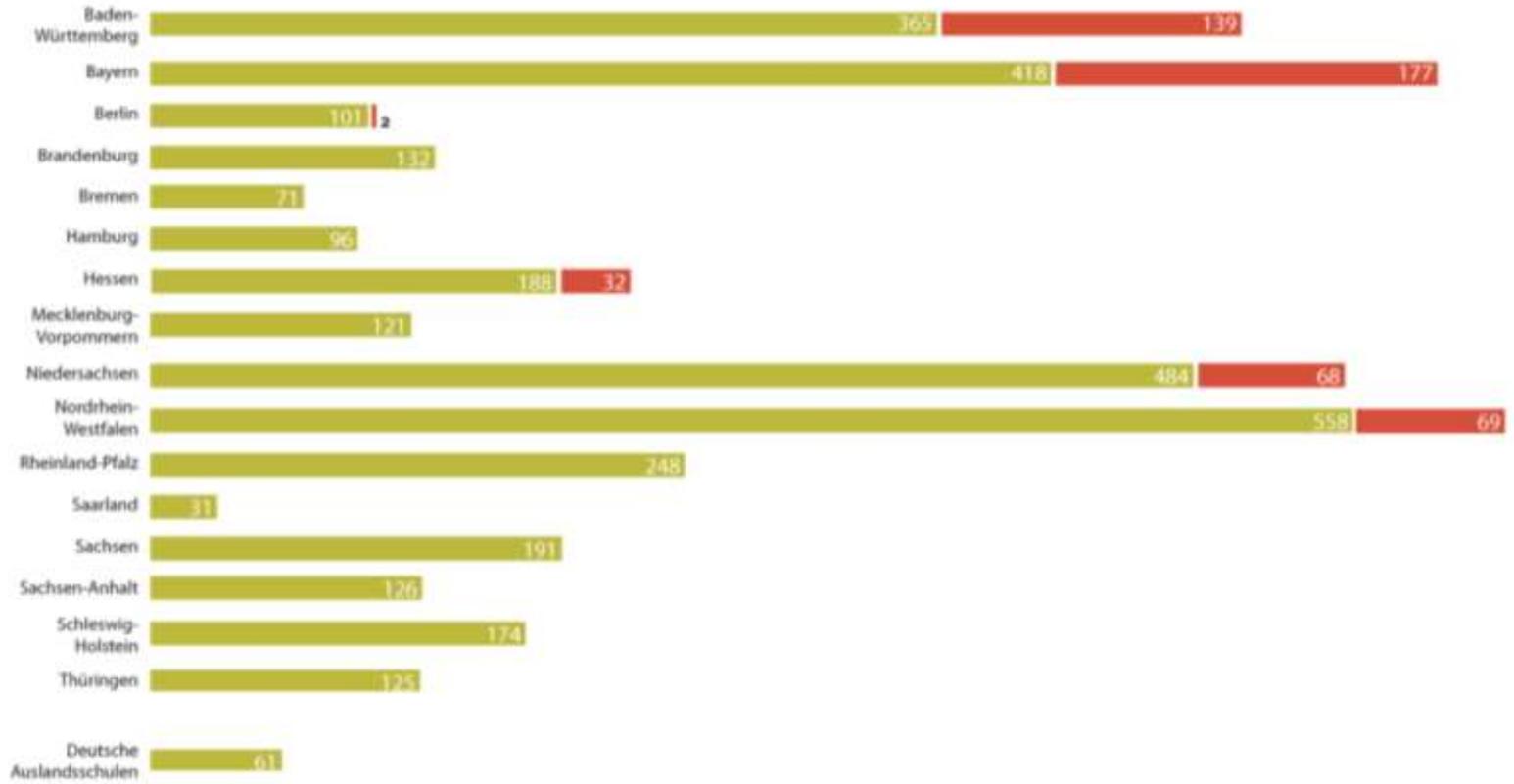
Legende:

= Teilnehmende Schulen

Lessons Learned & Pending Questions

- Non-contiguity of units of reference allows for categories to be conceived as constructed, possibly contingent

- Constructions & their 'what', their 'how' and their 'who' (actors, institutions)

- Selective porousness (cf. Levitt & la Dehesa 2018, 1523)

- Socio-spatial positionings and relations in a framework other than the national

- Allowing for another perspective on differences and possibly inequalities

- How can we further develop research strategies?

- How can we represent these phenomena?

- …

Transnationalizing the research
*in education

- **Multi-sited** designs (different locations – not only physical space) & **multi-level**/multi-actor data collection (individual, classroom, school)

- Units of comparison = **schools** not countries

- Emphasis on **inter-relationships**, multi-directional travelling /**flows** of persons, practices, symbols, artefacts

- Follow that 'thing' (Marcus, 1995)

Researching the Transnational ~~vs.~~ *by* Transnationalizing the Research!

catharina.kessler@uni-goettingen.de
szakacs@gei.de

Thank you!

Table 1.1 Types of international studies

	Cross-national Comparison	*World System Research*	*Transnational Studies*
Units of reference	nation states, national societies, boundary-fixed containers	macro regions, world system, entire globe	border crossing, pluri-local, societal spaces
Units of analysis	social classes, values, institutions, identity	Centre–periphery structures of social classes, values	biographies, families, organisations, institutions, identity
Units of measurement	individuals, households, rituals, texts, practices	flows of goods and information, organisations	individuals, households, rituals, flows of goods

(Pries 2008)