

Baltic Peripeties. Narratives of Reformations, Revolutions and Catastrophes Summary of Theoretical Approach and Key Areas Of Research

Introduction

As a category of production of meaning, 'peripety' was first used in Aristotle's *Poetics*. There, it denotes the turning point in a story, the event in which it becomes obvious that what is expected will not happen. As an umbrella term for all sorts of turning points, whether they be revolutions, reformations, catastrophes, or tipping points, it has considerable analytical potential that has yet to be explored.

The joint research programme 'Baltic Peripeties', developed by researchers from the University of Greifswald together with partners from Tartu and Trondheim aims to use the term 'peripety' to extend 'narration' and 'event' as novel means for investigating and understanding the Baltic Sea region (B.S.R.). In the context of the narrative turn, narration is understood as the anthropological foundation for human perception of reality. Narrations produce meaning by singling out a particular event from a per se infinite stream of occurrences. This re-evaluation of one point as a turning point establishes the centre of a plot that has a definite beginning ('What leads to the event?') and a definite end ('What consequences does the event have?') and thereby segments time and space in a meaningful way. Peripety, therefore, is a key to the production of meaning. It influences our perceptions of the world and leaves its mark on political convictions and social actions, economic decisions, socio-ecological and cultural frames of meaning.

On this basis, the IRTG research programme aims to examine the narrative constitution of the Baltic Sea region: which historically relevant peripeties determine past and current perceptions of the Baltic Sea region? What kind of social, cultural, political, ecological and economic agency do these peripeties possess (historically, currently and for the future)? Do different peripeties with distinct effects exist alongside each other? If so, do they interact, stand in competition or do they exclude one another? In addressing such questions, the IRTG will be the first to make theoretical and methodical advances in the application of the concept of peripety as a tool of enquiry in regional studies and advance the state of the art in the field of narratology.

Key Areas Of Research

The research programme within the IRTG aims to establish the term 'peripety' as an analytical concept across disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. For this reason, the research work carried out in every research project and the discussion thereof in seminars and workshops will contribute to the continuing development of the concept. This will allow the researchers to become acquainted with narratological approaches as a method for researching the humanities and social sciences. Through discussions across disciplines, they will also have the opportunity to critically reflect on the benefits and/or the possible difficulties of applying narratological concepts to their discipline. The IRTG's "Baltic Peripeties" Project structures the field of research using the following four key areas of research

1) Narrativisations

Human production of meaning is fundamentally narrative. The proposed IRTG will apply this premise to conduct innovative studies in the field of Baltic Sea region research. The "Narrativisation" frame contains those PhD projects that examine phenomena yet to be recognised as narratives. The aim of these projects is to reinterpret those phenomena by using narratological approaches. This, for instance, includes statements and writings of political theory as much as grand national narratives and presentations of environmental crisis. The concept of peripety will allow us to reveal the narrative nature of the phenomena studied. Consequently, the key questions include: What are the hidden peripeties of the examined phenomena? What can be understood, if phenomena are not conceived as they are currently constructed, but as products of certain peripety constructions? Projects using this research frame are therefore interested in examining areas of research relevant to the Baltic Sea, using

the IRTG's narrative paradigm, to explain plausibilities at the political, social, academic and aesthetic levels within the Baltic Sea region resulting from narrative meaning production.

2) Negotiating Peripeties

The second research frame consists of PhD projects that examine phenomena already understood as narrative and which, consequently, can be analysed with regard to their peripeties. The focus of the research questions is on the duality of every peripety: 1) the choice of peripety determines what its respective narrative will look like, and 2) the peripety is not given through a chain of occurrences but is instead the object of a work of interpretation which determines whether or not an occurrence is suitable to act as a peripety.

The research frame is therefore based on the hypothesis that groups in their various socio-cultural dimensions (families, companies, organisations, regions, nations etc.) are constituted through the construction of narratives. This hypothesis also claims that alternative stories of minorities exist alongside the dominant narratives. The foci of this second research frame, therefore, are: 1) the competition of historically provable narratives constructed by the same peripeties. How, for instance, does the Catholic Church tell the story of Reformation in a Lutheran Swedish context? 2) The research frame also contains projects that are interested in the competition of alternative peripeties, which means, they deal with the constellations in which different social groups construct alternative peripeties from the same chain of occurrences. Is, for instance, the Reformation still an identity-providing turning point for majority groups in the Baltic Sea region? Following Hayden White: in which cases have different groups generated alternative peripeties from the same chronology? And why, within a given cultural context, have formerly established turning points given way over time to alternative peripeties?

3) Interrelations between Macro-Level- and Micro-Level-Peripeties

The third research frame, like the second, deals with the relationship between different constructions of peripeties. However, it does not focus on alternative peripeties that compete for sovereignty of interpretation. This frame assumes that social systems consist of correlating social levels with their respective actors (individuals, families, firms, institutions, states, cultures) that often interact with each other in unpredictable ways. Every actor builds her*his own identity through narratives with their own specific peripeties. PhD projects in this frame examine how, within a social system, these different peripeties on different social levels interplay with each other. How do peripeties on one level affect other levels? Is it useful to apply Yuri Lotman's distinction between an explosive and cumulative re-structuring of cultural spaces to describe the nature of the interrelations? In the first case, an "explosive" event permeates all social levels at once. Peripeties like the fall of the Berlin Wall fundamentally test social institutions on the macro-level and provoke new biographic and collective narrations on the micro-level. In the second case, a macro-peripety can be conceptualised as the "tipping point", the moment where a previously stable state of being becomes unstable due to the incremental effect of numerous small changes. In a narratological sense this means that apparently unrelated narratives on the micro-level (e.g. individual members of a family, employees of a company, or political parties in a party system) may interact with each other in such a way that they no longer confirm, or even invalidate an identity-forming narrative on the macro-level (a family, a company, or a political system). In such situations, a new shared narrative and with it a new peripety will emerge on the macro-level. This dynamic (little changes have big effects) can be observed in all complex, multi-level systems: financial markets, ecosystems, and also social contexts. It governs crucial aspects of economic, historical or political discourse, and it is reflected, problematised or pushed forward by literature, film, and other art forms.

4) On the Theoretical and Aesthetic Design of Peripety

The fourth research frame pertains to PhD projects that deal more intensively with the self-reflective potential of the concept of peripety. This area of inquiry includes studies which critique their own discipline (or a field of research within that discipline) regarding its dependency on certain peripetic constructions. The frame also opens up the possibility of

including PhD projects that work to develop narratological methodology as well as meta-theoretical questions regarding the term 'peripety'. Besides philosophy and media studies, those disciplines that relate to the performative production of meaning in artistic works are especially relevant in this context, because from romanticism onwards self-reflection has been inherent to all fine arts. All PhD projects from the field of literary studies will therefore per se deal with texts that reflect their own means of telling stories, i.e. their own means of constructing peripeties. The aim of this research frame is to apply the self-reflective potential of the humanities to the analysis of peripeties: how is the irrevocability of the peripety reflected in the process of its representation in the artistic work? Does the choice of medium influence the construction of the peripety? The starting and testing points of meta-theoretical reflection will be those peripeties that have developed agency in narratives in and of the Baltic Sea region, or are of relevance for the Baltic Sea region, whether these locate the defining moment of change in the past or the future. This research frame has two interwoven subsections: one of history of science and one that aims at a deepened theorising of the term peripety.

Further information below:



Medieninformation

Internationales Graduiertenkolleg zu Wendepunkten im Ostseeraum entsteht an der Universität Greifswald

Universität Greifswald, 13.07.2020

Die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) wird die Einrichtung des neuen internationalen Graduiertenkollegs "Ostsee-Peripetien. Reformationen, Revolutionen, Katastrophen" an der Universität Greifswald fördern. Sprecher des Kollegs ist Prof. Dr. Eckhard Schumacher von der Universität Greifswald. Kooperationspartner sind die University of Tartu in Estland und die Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Norwegen. Das Graduiertenkolleg soll die Arbeit im April 2021 aufnehmen. Insgesamt stehen etwas über 4 Millionen Euro für zunächst viereinhalb Jahre zur Verfügung.

Der Begriff *Peripetie* bezeichnet in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften eine Kategorie der narrativen Sinnbildung. Er wird erstmals in Aristoteles' *Poetik* verwendet und beschreibt den Wendepunkt in einer Geschichte, das Ereignis also, in dem deutlich wird, dass das, was in der Welt der Erzählung erwartet wird, anders als zunächst erwartet eintreten wird. Der Ausdruck kann als neutraler Sammelbegriff für Wendepunkte aller Art stehen, für Revolutionen, Reformationen, Katastrophen, dramatische Ereignisse oder *tipping points*, also Momente, in denen eine geradlinige, scheinbar unveränderbare Entwicklung überraschend und unumkehrbar abbricht und eine neue Wendung nimmt.

Im internationalen Graduiertenkolleg soll mit Hilfe des Peripetie-Begriffs untersucht werden, wie sich die Vorstellung des Ostseeraums in Erzählungen und Erzählweisen konstituiert, die durch spezifische Ereignisse, Wendepunkte oder auch Katastrophen geprägt sind. Solch ein Ereignis mit unerwarteten Konsequenzen war etwa der Fall des Eisernen Vorhangs. "Solche Wendepunkte sind nicht nur für literarische oder filmische Erzählungen relevant, sie bestimmen auch die Wahrnehmung von historischen Ereignissen, den politischen Diskurs und die Alltagssprache", so Prof. Eckhard Schumacher, Sprecher des Kollegs.

Ziel des Graduiertenkollegs ist es, die Rolle von Erzählungen und Ereigniskonstruktionen für Wahrnehmung des Ostseeraums in den Fokus der Ostseeraumforschung zu rücken. Hierbei geht es weniger um die Wiederbelebung einer Ereignisgeschichte, als um die Hinwendung zum flexibleren Forschungsansatz des *narrative turn*, der das Erzählen als anthropologische Grundlage für die Aneignung der Welt durch den Menschen versteht.

Sowohl fiktionale als auch faktuale, beschreibende Texte produzieren Sinn durch das Herauslösen eines einzelnen Ereignisses aus einem per se unabschließbaren Strom von Geschehnissen. Diese Umwertung eines Geschehnisses zu einem Ereignis mit Wendecharakter bildet das Zentrum eines *plots* mit einem definitiven Anfang bei dem es um die Frage "Was führt zu dem Ereignis?" und einem definitiven Ende mit der Frage "Welche Konsequenzen hat das Ereignis?" führt. Die Wahl der Peripetie beeinflusst deshalb unsere individuelle und kollektive Wahrnehmung der Welt und unsere Argumentation, wie in dieser Welt zu handeln sei. Die Peripetie prägt je nach Konstruktion politische Überzeugungen und soziales Handeln, wirtschaftliche Entscheidungen, ökologische und kulturelle Bedeutungsrahmen. Sie ist der Schlüssel zur Herstellung von Sinnhaftigkeit und zur Erfahrbarkeit der Welt.

Auf dieser methodologischen Basis soll das Projekt den Ostseeraum auf seine narrative

Konstitution hin untersuchen: Welche historisch relevant gewordenen Peripetien bestimmten und bestimmen die Wahrnehmung des Ostseeraums? Wie kann man ihre Wirkmächtigkeit auf die soziale, kulturelle, politische, ökologische und ökonomische Gegenwart und Zukunft des Ostseeraums beschreiben? Existieren verschiedene Peripetien mit je eigenen Effekten nebeneinander? Falls ja, interagieren sie, stehen sie in Konkurrenz zueinander, oder schließen sie sich aus? Und wie muss man das narratologische Konzept der Peripetie weiterentwickeln, um es für Regionalstudien fruchtbar zu machen?

Das Graduiertenkolleg führt verschiedene geistes-, kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Disziplinen zusammen, verbindet die Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaften mit der Geschichtswissenschaft, der Philosophie sowie der Politikwissenschaft und verankert diesen interdisziplinären Verbund durch die Kooperation mit den Partneruniversitäten Trondheim und Tartu zugleich in der internationalen Diskussion. Als Verbund für Dissertationsprojekte, die sich mit den "Kulturen des Ostseeraums" vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart befassen, stärkt das Graduiertenkolleg den gleichnamigen universitären Schwerpunkt und die vielfältigen Initiativen zur Ostseeraumforschung an der Universität Greifswald.

Weitere Informationen

[Link zur Presseinformation der DFG](#)

Partneruniversitäten

- University of Tartu, Tartu, Estland
- Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norwegen

[Zum Medienfoto](#)

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Media Information

New international research training group will be established to research turning points in the Baltic Sea Region at the University of Greifswald

Greifswald, 18 July 2020

The German Research Foundation (DFG) will support the establishment of the new inter-national research training group "Baltic Peripeties. Narratives of Reformations, Revolutions and Catastrophes" at the University of Greifswald. Prof. Dr Eckhard Schumacher of the University of Greifswald is the spokesperson of the research training group, which is a joint project together with colleagues at the University of Tartu in Estonia and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Norway. The research training group is scheduled to start in April 2021. The joint project will be funded by the DFG with over 4 million euros for an initial four and a half year period.

In the humanities and social sciences, the term "peripety" refers to a category of production of meaning. It was first used in Aristotle's Poetics and describes the turning point in a story, the event in which it becomes obvious that what is expected will occur differently than initially expected. It serves as a neutral umbrella term for all sorts of turning points, whether they be revolutions, reformations, catastrophes, dramatic events or tipping points, i. e. moments in which a linear, seemingly unchangeable stream of occurrences breaks off unexpectedly and takes a new turn.

Researchers of the international research training group will use the concept of peripety to investigate narrative constructions of the Baltic Sea Region and how specific events, turning points or even catastrophes shape these constructions. One such event with unexpected consequences was the fall of the Iron Curtain. "Such turning points are not only relevant for literary or cinematic narratives, they also determine the perception of historical events, political discourse and everyday language," says Prof. Eckhard Schumacher, spokesperson of the research group.

The aim of the research training group is to educate doctoral students by extending 'narration' and 'event' as novel means for investigating and understanding perceptions and constructions of the Baltic Sea Region. It is less about the revival of a history of events than about turning to a more flexible research approach of the narrative turn, which understands narration as the anthropological foundation for human perception of reality.

Fictional as well as factual narrations produce meaning by singling out a particular event from a per se infinite stream of occurrences. This re-evaluation of one event to an event with a turning point establishes the centre of a plot that has a definite beginning defined by the question 'What leads to the event?' and a definite end construed by the question 'What consequences does the event have?'. Segmenting time and space in a meaningful way, peripety is the key to the production of meaning. It influences our perceptions of the world and leaves its mark on political convictions and social actions, economic decisions, socio-ecological and cultural frames of meaning.

On this methodological basis, the research project aims to examine the narrative constitution of the Baltic Sea Region: which historically relevant peripeties determine past and current perceptions of the Baltic Sea Region? What kind of social, cultural, political, ecological and economic agency do these peripeties possess (historically, currently and for the future)? Do different peripeties with distinct effects exist alongside each other? If so, do they interact, are they in competition with each other or do they exclude one another? In addressing such questions, the international research training group will be the first to make theoretical and methodical advances in the application of the narratological concept of peripety as a tool of enquiry in regional studies and advance the state of the art in the field of narratology.

The research training group "Baltic Peripeties" brings together various disciplines in the humanities, cultural studies and social sciences, combines literature and linguistics with history, philosophy and political science, and anchors this interdisciplinary network in the international debate through cooperation with the partner universities of Trondheim and Tartu. As a joint project for educating doctoral students up to graduation in the key field of research "Cultures of the Baltic Sea Region" from the Middle Ages to the present day, the international research training group strengthens the university's research focus and the diverse initiatives for Baltic Sea Region research at the University of Greifswald.

Further Information

[Press Release DFG](#)

Partner universities:

- University of Tartu, Tartu, Estland
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