



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT – RESEARCH NETWORKS

Registration number, Östersjöstiftelsen: 23-RN-0004

Project manager: Irina Seits

Project title: *HSUD – DNRI: Practices of Decolonization and the Rise of New Imperialisms in the Uses of Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development*

1. Purpose of the research network

The HSUD–DRNI research network was founded as a collaboration among institutions in the Baltic Sea region focusing on shared urban heritage and sustainable development. The idea emerged in 2021 and led to an application to the Swedish Institute (SI), which funded the Seed Collaboration project “HSUD – Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development.”

Initially, the network united Södertörn University, Jönköping University, the Institute for Historical Research at the Higher School of Economics (St. Petersburg), and the European University (St. Petersburg). Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, collaboration with Russia was suspended, and the network was joined by the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at the University of Tartu. The network’s purpose has been to bring together researchers and institutions working on issues of cultural heritage, urban development, sustainability, and responses to geopolitical crises in the Baltic Sea region. In 2023 the network received funding from the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (Östersjöstiftelsen), which allowed for the HSUD’s further growth and development. At present, the HSUD network members include: Södertörn University (Irina Seits, project manager), Stockholm University (Ekaterina Kalinina), Uppsala University (Maria Engström), University of Tartu (Elena Pavlova), Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki (Markku Kangaspuro and Dmitri Frolov), Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities and Museum of Modern Art in Skopje (Tihomir Topuzovski), and CISR Berlin (Oleg Panchenkov and Lilia Voronkova).

2. A description of the research network’s activities funded by Östersjöstiftelsen

With ÖSS support, HSUD–DRNI organized a wide range of academic and cultural activities. The first HSUD public event took place already in May 2022 at Färgfabriken: a conversation between international artists working on environmental and urban sustainability, as part of the conference ‘The Politics of Environmental Knowledge’ organized by the BEEGS Doctoral students and funded by CBEES. In October 2022, the conference ‘Urban



Sustainability and Cultural Landscapes in Europe in Times of Crises' was organized by HSUD at Södertörn University and Långholmen under support by CBEES conference grant, bringing over 20 presenters from Europe and the US to discuss challenges exposed by Russia's aggression and their implications for sustainable development. The decision to further develop the network was taken at that conference, which resulted in the prepared application to the Östersjöstiftelsen (ÖSS) Network Grant. The ÖS Network Grant (2023–2025) enabled further expansion and consolidation of the HSUD network under the title: “HSUD – DRNI: Practices of Decolonization and the Rise of New Imperialisms in the Uses of Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development” (based at the IKL, Department of Aesthetics).

Members co-organized public and academic events, worked on joint projects, and prepared applications. Field trips played a key role: in November 2023 members visited Tallinn and Tartu; in March 2024, a research trip to Baku deepened collaboration and inspired new project ideas; in October 2024, members visited Skopje, presenting research at the Museum of Modern Art; and multiple working sessions took place in Stockholm between 2023–2025, with visits from partners from Skopje, Helsinki, and Berlin.

3. The output from the research network, for example applications for research funding

The HSUD–DRNI network generated a substantial research output, including several submitted project applications and joint publications. Applications prepared and submitted during 2024–2025 include:

- ÖSS: 'Weaponizing Visual Cultures: Anti-Environmentalism and Neo-Extractivism in Contemporary Petrostates. The Cases of Russia and Azerbaijan' (Irina Seits & Maria Engström, 2025).
- VR: 'Northálgia and Restoration of the North in the South Caucasus: The Legacy of Nordic Expatriates in Baku and Batumi in the Russian Empire' (Irina Seits & Dmitri Frolov, 2025).
- VR Artistic Research: 'The landscapes of exile and the experiences of war: migrant art exhibitions and activist practices in South-Eastern and Northern Europe since 2014' (Irina Seits & Tihomir Topuzovski, 2025).
- HORIZON-MSCA/Erasmus: 'InCiTe – Invisible City Technopolitics' (Ekaterina Kalinina & Tihomir Topuzovski among applicants, 2025).



- VR: 'Migrant Art & Migration Crisis in Europe since 2015' (Irina Seits & Tihomir Topuzovski, 2024).
- ÖSS: 'Dark Petroaesthetics: Visual Anti-Environmentalism in Contemporary Russia and Azerbaijan' (Irina Seits & Maria Engström, 2024).

Academic outputs also include participation in the international conference 'Neo-Soviet Myth and Cultural Recycling in Contemporary Russia' (Uppsala/Umeå/Royal Academy of Letters, 2023) that was organized by the HSUD-DRNI member Maria Engström, resulting in a contracted Routledge book project. Contributions included chapters by Maria Engström (Uppsala University), Ekaterina Kalinina (Stockholm University), and Irina Seits (Södertörn University).

4. The research network's contribution to research and/or doctoral studies at Södertörn University

The network has made an important contribution to the research environment at Södertörn University by bringing together international scholars and institutions. Several HSUD–DRNI events were hosted at SH, including major conferences and working sessions, as well as presentations at the CBEES Annual Conferences (2023, 2023) and at the Department of Aesthetics. The collaboration strengthened Södertörn's profile in research on cultural heritage, sustainability, and responses to geopolitical crises. It also fostered interdisciplinary dialogue between aesthetics, history, media studies, and political science, which are key areas at SH. Doctoral students and early-career researchers benefited from the opportunities to engage with the network and its activities.

5. The contribution of the research network to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

The HSUD–DRNI network has significantly contributed to advancing knowledge of the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe. Through its focus on cultural heritage, sustainable urban development, and the political uses of the past, the network has illuminated how Russia's war on Ukraine and broader geopolitical tensions shape regional futures. Collaborative research has deepened understanding of how cultural and urban sustainability are affected by crises, while also highlighting Nordic–Caucasus connections and the legacy of expatriate networks. The network's publications, field trips, and events generated new insights into heritage politics, decolonization, and environmental challenges, strengthening international scholarship and cross-border knowledge exchange.