Workshop

New Approaches to the Study of the ICTY Archives
From Technicalities to Social Resonance

University of Graz, 15–16 October 2026
Application deadline: 31 March 2026

In April 2008, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) launched its online Court Records Database, making documents from Tribunal proceedings broadly accessible for research and teaching. Early expectations were high: the evidentiary record introduced at trial was hoped to help future generations "understand the region's history and how the conflicts came to pass." Almost two decades later, the database remains indispensable—yet its epistemic, methodological, and political implications are still only partially explored.

A strong belief continues to hold that trial transcripts and judgments convey an "irreproachable historical truth" about the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. At the same time, the ICTY archive and database are increasingly approached through critical perspectives that interrogate the power relations embedded in digital legal infrastructures, including what has been termed a "regime of digital coloniality." Drawing on Adla Isanović, this concept refers to a constellation of legal, technological, and epistemic practices through which digital data are collected, governed, and rendered meaningful in ways that may reproduce asymmetries of authority, control, and value attribution—particularly between international institutions and affected societies. From this perspective, calls to open confidential or sealed materials often rest on the assumption that "more data" will automatically generate deeper understanding, even though the publicly available ICTY record has rarely been studied systematically or at scale.

This exploratory workshop addresses these gaps by treating ICTY records not simply as sources to be read, but as a digital infrastructure that shapes what can be known, by whom, and how. Rather than abandoning close reading, we propose combining it with distant reading approaches—bringing qualitative interpretation into dialogue with computational methods—and fostering transparent workflows for assembling, structuring, analyzing, and visualizing ICTY materials. We welcome empirical case studies, methodological "workbench" papers that make research processes explicit and critically reflect on reliability and limitations, as well as conceptual interventions.

Guiding questions include (but are not limited to):

1) Tribunal knowledge and "historical truth"

- What kinds of historical knowledge does the ICTY produce through its procedural and evidentiary logics, and what remains systematically marginal or invisible?

- How do "tribunal truths" shape historiography, education, and public discourse, and where do they clash with institutionally established interpretations of the wars in the post-Yugoslav space?

2) Database infrastructure and digital coloniality

- How do metadata standards, taxonomies, search functions, and interface design enable or constrain particular research questions and narratives?

- How can the concept of "digital coloniality" be critically applied to, tested against, or challenged by the ICTY database?

- What roles do database management practices, language regimes, and legal or institutional access barriers play in shaping knowledge production?

3) Gaps, secrecy, and the materiality of the digital

- What are the analytical consequences of redactions, sealed filings, and missing materials in ICTY records?

- How can research designs make such absences visible, rather than smoothing them away?

4) Methods, triangulation, and reproducibility

- What are the potentials and limits of computational approaches for studying the ICTY archives?

- What forms of triangulation, validation, and documentation can render digital findings robust, interpretable, and reproducible?

5) Memory institution, pedagogy, and politics

- In what ways does the ICTY database function as a "memory institution," and which actors, temporalities, spaces, and categories does it foreground?

- What kinds of social and political phenomena become legible through ICTY materials beyond their immediate judicial context?

- How are ICTY archive materials used in teaching, public history, and other forms of knowledge transmission?

The workshop aims both to identify best practices for digital research on the ICTY and to foster a critical assessment of the Tribunal as an "epistemic engine" whose archive shapes knowledge production and memory politics.

Practical information

Date: 15–16 October 2026

Location: University of Graz, Institute of History

Working papers will be circulated prior to the workshop to foster in-depth discussion. The workshop will be held in English. For all accepted participants, travel expenses, accommodation, and meals will be covered.

Submission

To apply, please submit:

- an abstract (250–300 words), and
- a brief biographical note (approximately 100 words)

in a single PDF document by **31 March 2026** to: suedost@uni-graz.at

Applicants will be notified of the outcome by **30 April 2026**.

The deadline for submitting full papers is **15 September 2026**.

Organizers:

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