Context. The local is a courted space. As communal activist groups call for local consumer behavior, local congregations of faith mushroom in a spirit of neighbourly care. In business administration and politics, the call for front-line responsibility has become a standard response to challenges of pressing contemporary concern. The local thus appears as a governing notion that brings order to the assessment of the world. It offers a meaningful frame of reference, allowing members in society to pursue their aspirations within a manageable and also tangible realm. Along the way, it provides people with a distinct “regime of truth” (Foucault), including a robust set of convictions, beliefs, and patterns of reasoning.

Connectivity and change in antiquity. The Graeco-Roman world was a one marked by accelerated change. From the Great Colonization through the Hellenistic Age to the swiftly expanding Roman Imperium, the inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin experienced a persistent expansion of their world. As their horizons widened, communication within this world intensified. Growing networks of exchange facilitated new modes of connectivity. Almost every generation saw people, goods, and ideas travel further, faster. New arteries of traffic once again increased communication, making everything closer. As their mental map of the world expanded, local communities also grew closer in cultural, political, economic, and religious terms. The resulting modes of interconnectivity have received much scholarly attention. Recent interest in network theories, fueled by social media communication on the internet, adds to this approach.

Local responses. The research seminar turns to the flip side of hyper-connectivity. How did local communities respond to changes in the world around them, and how did they position themselves in a swiftly expanding environment? Many voices from antiquity survive that resented the idea of accelerated change; to them, the local was paramount. In scholarship, such praise is either understood as literary trope or as a merely descriptive reference, applying to, for instance, local traditions and tastes, local elites, or local history. But it appears that the local itself is also a normative force that impacts humans in their everyday exchanges. It is both a real and a metaphorical space filled with social meaning. At times, it overlaps with notions of ethnic identity and belief, but it is by not tied exclusively to any of them; it impacts society in an even broader sense. – Drawing on a wide range of disciplines in the Classical Studies, the research seminar seeks to unravel the inherent force of localism and its impact on the ancient Mediterranean world.