

Basel, May 2023

## 6th Basel Summer School in African Studies (23 Aug - 01 Sep 2023) **Making knowledge policy-relevant: The SSH's role in global sustainable development**

The Centre for African Studies Basel ZASB calls for applications for the Basel Summer School in African Studies 2023. The Summer School aims at stimulating and consolidating a new perspective on African Studies with a focus on African Studies as “area studies”. It addresses themes theoretically, conceptually and methodologically relevant to the pursuit of reflection on the intellectual challenge of Africa as an object of knowledge on the one hand and its contribution to general scholarship on the other.

The goals of the Summer School are the following:

- Allow PhD students to engage critically with new theoretical, conceptual and methodological developments in African Studies and make them relevant to their work under the guidance of senior scholars.
- Encourage PhD students to reflect on the potential relevance of knowledge on Africa to improve our theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools in the disciplines and interdisciplinary work.
- Foster among PhD students a sense of belonging to a community of scholars to pursue knowledge and scholarship.
- Stimulate junior scholars to work towards carving a space for African Studies in the broader field of scholarship and, in this way, help African Studies to claim a place right at the centre of knowledge production.

The Summer School is organised by the Centre in Basel every second year, alternating with the ZASB-CODESRIA Summer School held in Dakar, Senegal. The ZASB offers the Summer School in the framework of the Graduate Network African Studies Basel.

### **Concept note**

Graduate students are typically highly motivated to carry out research relevant to current policy issues and benefits society. However, standard practices and traditions of scientific knowledge production do not guarantee that these objectives can be achieved in the context of graduate research projects. There is a need for training courses that address theoretical and conceptual issues and practical challenges. The Basel Summer School 2023 addresses the challenge of policy relevance in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) in general and area studies in particular by mapping out the differences between basic and applied research. The crucial distinction is between knowledge production geared towards understanding problems and knowledge production aiming at identifying solutions. The Summer School aims to harness the strengths of basic research in fields bearing directly on development in Africa to emphasize the need for an actual understanding of the problems to be addressed. Policy relevance should bear on working out the terms under which good problem definitions can yield policy options. The ultimate goal of the Summer School is to help participants develop critical skills enabling them to become researchers who live up to the highest scientific standards and are equipped with the transformative skills to make an impact.

Faced with global sustainability challenges calling for transnational, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral approaches, evidence-based policy has emerged as a critical notion for designing and implementing policies

by governments, international organizations and NGOs. This entails a growing demand for policy-relevant knowledge posing questions about the relationship between basic and applied research and the standards to which research should adhere, i.e. scientific rigour and societal transformation. This is especially true in the social sciences and humanities, which often appear to resist this growing demand. This impression bears, in part, on the SSH's emphasis on conceptual issues, which in turn, put the SSH in a position to engage with issues of critical importance to the development of sustainable, practical approaches and their implementation on an international and global level.

One critical area in the distinction between basic and applied research concerns how the emphasis on solutions (applied research) may reflect the power of international institutions, development actors or funding organizations in the 'North' to define the problems of Africa (and other 'Southern' corners of the world). This issue plays a central role in debates over coloniality, positionality or diversity and provides a framework within which engaging with conceptual issues (those that help us define and understand problems) may contribute towards making better policy choices in the interest of the societies concerned. In contrast to SSH in general, area studies have an interdisciplinary tradition and, historically, an applied orientation. This orientation continues in the specific expectations towards the SSH in the context of the so-called Global South regarding policy relevance, going as far as to make solution orientation justifying their continuation.

The Summer School offers young SSH scholars a platform to examine the challenges of the tension and the potential for mutual fertilization between the requirements of scholarly standards and social impact. Participants will reflect on their research's potential for societal transformation, develop theoretical and methodological skills in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, and learn to locate themselves in various academic and policy fields.

The Summer School takes place in the week leading up to the STS-CH 2023 conference *Science, Expertise and Other Modes of Knowledge: Trends, Patterns, and Prospects*, under the joint organisation of the Swiss Association for the Study of Science, Technology and Society, the Centre for African Studies Basel (ZASB) and the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Basel.

In focused **training sessions**, the Summer School will address theoretical and conceptual issues bearing on the difference between understanding and defining a problem (basic research) and identifying solutions and their scope (applied research), as well as policy issues on the conditions which must be created for solutions to work (implementation). This will be done with attention to issues of transdisciplinarity and the co-production of knowledge. Given the importance of coming to terms with calls for the decolonization of development cooperation, there will be a focus on the role of values and norms in transferring knowledge between academic actors, policy-makers and society more generally and on their implications for developing and implementing policies in particular.

Chair:

- Elísio Macamo (Sociology/African Studies)

Lecturers:

- Alexandra Hofmänner (Science & Technology Studies)
- Ralph Weber (Philosophy/Political Sciences)
- Henri-Michel Yéré (History)

The **Advanced Study Skills workshop** offers participants a forum to discuss how to jointly translate their research into policy-relevant knowledge and explore and leverage its transformative potential. They will do so in peer clusters and exchange sessions with resource persons from implementation and funding organisations:

- In thematic interdisciplinary peer clusters, participants engage with each other's research to identify synergies finding entry points for future collaboration towards joint output (publication, scientific event, project proposal). Each cluster brings together three to five participants working on a joint research field, practical challenge, geographical area and/or methodological approach (depending on participants' research focus).
- In exchange sessions with the resource persons, participants pitch their research focusing on policy relevance and potential impact. In a feedback round, they discuss potential and challenges to their work with the resource persons from an implementation and funding perspective.

Facilitators:

- Alexandra Hofmänner
- Pascal Schmid

Resource persons:

- Marion Bétizeau, Senior Scientific Officer, Velux Foundation
- Fabian Käser, Head, Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE)
- Nathalie Wyser, Policy Advisor for Research, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) **TBC**

At the **STS-CH 2023 conference** (31.08.-01.09.2023, [www.sts2023.ch](http://www.sts2023.ch)), participants can present their reflections about the relationship between research, policy-making and social impact regarding their research to a Swiss and international academic audience.

## **Application**

The Summer School will have a maximum of 18 participants.

Participants will be selected on the strength and merits of a two-page application in which they state how they approach the challenge of policy-relevance in the social sciences and humanities and explain the transformative potential of their research. In addition, applications should include a CV of the applicant (via the upload link in the application form).

The selection criteria are:

- Originality and quality of the PhD project
- Applicant's ability to engage with the conceptual, theoretical and methodological key questions of the Summer School
- Applicant's ability to reflect on the transformative potential of the research project
- Academic and professional merits and potential of the applicant

Applications must be submitted via the online application form:

[www.zasb.unibas.ch/en/summerschool/apply](http://www.zasb.unibas.ch/en/summerschool/apply)

*The deadline for applications is 2 July 2023.*

## **Grants for Africa-based participants**

Up to 9 participants from institutions in Africa (African countries, except Maghreb region and Egypt) may receive a grant covering the costs of travel, accommodation and subsistence, Summer School participation fee, and the STS-CH 2023 conference participation fee.

Should more than nine participants based in Africa be accepted for the Summer School, grants will be applied based on the assessment of the participants' role and engagement at their home institution as well as their career perspectives.

## **Practical information**

The summer school is open for PhD students enrolled in Switzerland and abroad.

The summer school and the STS-CH 2023 conference take place on-site in Basel, Switzerland.

For PhD candidates enrolled at a university in Switzerland or in Africa, the participation fee is CHF 125; for all other PhD candidates CHF 200. The fee includes participation in the Summer School program, lunch at the course days as well as the STS-CH 2023 conference fee.

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Website: [www.zasb.unibas.ch/en/summerschool](http://www.zasb.unibas.ch/en/summerschool)