



General Assembly, 15 December 2017 – Minutes

Time: 16:15-17:00

Venue: Kollegienhaus, Room 116

Present: Amal Adbrabo, Veit Arlt, Lilian Bieber, Lena Bloemertz, Oliver Brandt, Benjamin Brühwiler, Julia Büchele, Gregor Dobler, Elias Gebretsadik, Jacob Geuder, Susy Greuter, Dag Henrichsen, Madeleine Herren-Oesch, Kai Herzog, Mohomodou Houssouba, Sara Ilovu, Luregn Lenggenhager, Giorgio Miescher, Brigit Obrist, Silke Oldenburg, Matthew Osei Gyawu, Elísio Macamo, Cassandra Mark, James Merron, Tebuho Winnie Kanyimba, Stephen Kapinde, Kingdom Fungai Karuwo, Rita Kesselring, Sophie Oldfield, Sung Hea Park, Tibor Rechsteiner, Aidas Sanogo, Pascal Schmid, Fiona Siegenthaler, Natalie Tarr, Erich Thaler, Julia Tischler, Goin Lou Tina Virginie Tra, Nestor Zante

Absent with excuse: Till Förster, Christian Vandersee

1. Welcome

Veit Arlt welcomes the Assembly and commends the initiative and effort of the organizers of the workshop “Perspectives on communication, participation and governance”, which was held before the assembly from 2:15—4:00pm.

2. Minutes of the General Assembly of 19 June 2017

The minutes of the last General Assembly were published on the Centre's website two weeks ago and are accepted by the Assembly.

3. Communications

ECAS 2017 & Fachgruppe African Studies

The 7th European Conference on African Studies hosted at the University of Basel by the ZASB is considered a huge success by the international African Studies community and is referred to as one of the best ECAS conferences. Veit Arlt stresses the importance of the contribution of each and every one who supported ECAS and/or participated in the event. This is especially true for the students and volunteers. Their involvement helped building a strong peer group and thereby led to the establishment of the first Fachgruppe African Studies in November 2017.

New Website of the ZASB

The executive office is finalising the new website, which was announced by the University's administration long ago and will finally go online on 15 January 2018. In view of this process, the maintenance of the old site has been limited for some time now. The new site will thus feature much new and updated content.

Swiss Society for African Studies

In the morning, the last board meeting of the Swiss Society for African Studies this year took place in Berne.

- The most recent newsletter, edited by Nathalie Tarr and Veit Arlt featuring various contributions from ZASB members is available at the ZASB office as well as on the Society's website.
- Mohomodou Houssouba withdrew from his long time position on the board, where he acted as co-secretary of the Society. Veit Arlt extends the thanks of the Society for his long and loyal services. The Centre is now represented on the board by Elísio Macamo, Natalie Tarr and Veit Arlt.
- All members of the Centre are invited to join the Society, to be active in this national network. The board is dependent on active members.



- For 2018 there are three conferences & workshops planned on behalf the SGAS: 1) The conference “War and State Formation” organized at the University of Geneva by Didier Péclard, Martina Santschi and Jon Schubert is scheduled for 15-17 November 2018; 2) a workshop on the writings of Yambo Ouloguem organized by Christine Lequellec Cottier will be held from 18-19 May 2018 at the University of Lausanne (see the announcement in the Newsletter); 3) the biennial “Swiss Researching Africa Days” will be held in Berne from 26-27 October 2018 (see the call for panels in the Newsletter)
- The board of the Swiss Society for African Studies welcomes propositions for conferences or workshops to be budgeted for 2019. Two conferences have been proposed already. One on Africa-Asia relations to be held at the Université de Neuchâtel and an interdisciplinary conference Le peuplement de l’afrique to be held at the Université de Genève.

4. Implementation of the new structures for the African Studies network at the University of Basel

Elísio Macamo reports on the steps towards the implementation of an Africa research network at the University of Basel, coordinated by the ZASB, which is to integrate fields that are not part of African Studies as such. This process, which was initially scheduled for the spring semester 2017, was delayed due to the ECAS and is now taking up speed. The process shall be completed in June 2018. Elísio Macamo invites everyone to participate in this process.

Evaluation

Two years ago, all Africa-related activities at the University were surveyed in view of defining an “Africa-strategy” for the University of Basel. The results were evaluated by a commission led by former Vice Chancellor Marten Hoenen on a mandate of the rectorate. This allowed the Centre to make the University’s leadership understand what the Centre for African Studies Basel actually is (a network linking all scholars active in the field at this university and in institutions beyond the University), what role the Centre plays and that it is not an institute but precisely a coordinated network of scholars and institutions active in the field.

While at some point the Centre seemed under threat of being shut down by the rectorate, because it was considered out of sync with the rectorate’s vision, a new dynamic emerged during the evaluation process. The rectorate finally understood how many activities at the University are related to Africa and what role the Centre played in this. Subsequently, the rectorate was tempted to make “Africa” one of the five strategic themes of the University on the basis of a new Africa research network but also to shift the leadership of this network to the Swiss TPH. The Centre managed to recommend itself as the right structure and partner through which to coordinate and nurture this network.

The Centre insisted on the existing network to be strengthened, as well as on the need for sound structures guided by regulations, avoiding a duplication of structures (as was the case with the Kompetenzzentrum Afrika). The regulations of the Zentrum Eikones, also at the Faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences, provide the template. Elísio Macamo received the mandate to produce a plan for the implementation of the new strategy in African Studies. He makes it a point, that it is difficult but inevitable to explain to the rectorate the relevance of structures and research that might not be as visible as is the case with the life sciences, but that are fundamental to good research and conditional for the international recognition of the University of Basel as a Centre for the Study of Africa.

Structural aspects of the Strategy:

- The Centre must avoid the mistake which was made with the Kompetenzzentrum Afrika, when in 2009 a parallel structure was built that led to confusion and weakened both structures (i.e. the Centre for African Studies and the Kompetenzzentrum Afrika). This double structure was eventually consolidated in one single structure in 2013.
- It is key to now build a structure, which allows the Centre to reach out to areas that are not part of African Studies as such and thereby to become more relevant for the rectorate, rather than limiting its role to being just one small part (i.e. African Studies per se) of the Africa network at the risk of being pushed aside.
- Elísio Macamo points to advantages of such a new structure: For instance it is foreseen, that the



Deputy Vice Chancellor and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities shall be on the advisory board of the Centre and that the Gruppierungen (member categories of the University) are represented in the Steering Group. This will allow for a better integration of the ZASB in the University and a better flow of information, thus offering new opportunities

- The new structures shall thus include the following major elements: 1) advisory board 2) executive office 3) Steering Committee with both a representation of the various member categories (Gruppierungen) and the key fields of research (these shall be defined in the upcoming discussion process until the end of next semester) and 4) a spokesperson for the steering committee.

Aspects concerning the content of the Strategy:

- The Strategy merely makes a recommendation. It is the scholars active in the field who now engage with this proposition and define what the Key Areas of Activities or fields of research will be. While there is the vision and wish that Health, Life Sciences and Applied Research shall be clearly visible in this network, this does not imply that the rectorate interferes with what we do at the Centre in terms of research and teaching or that we must discontinue our activities and abandon well-established fields of research. Rather it is about expanding what the Centre does by creating an extended network beyond area studies.
 - The task force's suggestion "Moving with Africa" as slogan for the new Africa-strategy was met with skepticism by some members of the ZASB and it was discovered that it is already in use elsewhere. Therefore, the slogan "Studying Africa - understanding the world" was proposed.
 - This new slogan fits well with the University's strategic theme "European and Global Studies".
 - Elísio Macamo sees the inherent interdisciplinarity of African Studies as one of its major advantages, which should be further exploited. Based on this, Elísio Macamo, Veit Arlt and Pascal Schmid have prepared a document which sketches a road map for translating the Africa Strategy into practice. This document is circulating and is meant as a proposal to further discussion.
 - On Friday 22 December 2017 scholars from the various fields at the University of Basel from Postdoc Level upward are invited for a workshop to discuss the Strategy. In view of the huge response to the survey, the list of invitees had to be limited to scholars who will be at the University of Basel over the next few years and in a position to drive applications. Most invitees are members of the Centre African Studies.
 - The aim of the workshop is to identify themes that have the potential for collaboration between several scholars. The five key areas proposed by the strategy are taken as a starting point, but themes outside of the key areas may emerge that justify an extension or adjustment of the key areas because they prove to be crucial for the University's and the Centre's research agenda and/or promising in terms of the competences and commitment of a group of scholars.
- In spring 2018 a series of workshops organized around the key areas will bring together those scholars who wish to engage themselves with one of the themes identified in December. The aim is to establish (research) groups or clusters of committed scholars, plan concrete activities (applications, publications, events, courses) and identify speakers who will represent the groups in the steering committee. The agendas defined by these groups and the person they propose for their lead and representation in the Steering Committee will be presented to the General Assembly of June 2018.
- Generally speaking, it is especially the passionate commitment of its members, which made the rapid and successful growth of the Centre during the last years possible. And for the future this will be the key resource to draw on.

5. Varia & Discussion

Following the presentation for the new strategy by Elísio Macamo a number of questions are raised by members of the General Assembly and responded to by Elísio Macamo and Veit Arlt respectively:

- The first question inquires what exactly is meant by the term "we" as it has been used in various different meaning during the presentation and it seems not entirely clear to him this "we" exactly refers. Elísio Macamo identifies mainly the "steering committee" with the "we", which so far has been built along the team of the "Living the City" theme but which failed to meet in the past two years beyond the two General Assemblies per year. 2018 will see regular meetings again. "We" also refers to all those



participating at the workshop next week and the debates that will follow in the different workgroups which will be modelled along the five proposed research axes.

- The question is raised, whether the five Key Areas are already set? The Strategy merely gives a recommendation and it is the task of the workshop of 22 December to prove their viability or the need for modification/addition.
- Another questions refers to the stated “bottom-up” process of forming this strategy, while simultaneously MA students and PhD-researchers are being explicitly excluded from the workshop next Friday. Elísio Macamo responds that the old structures remain valid until the new regulations are agreed upon. The workshop’s design and purpose requires a limitation of the participation. There will be other meetings which will integrate students. (NB: the Executive Office will seek to allow for student observers where possible).
- Is the overall structure of the ZASB as presented before open for being debated or not? The answer is that the structure will remain similar to the existing one but with more participation. It follows a set template established at the Faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences and thus needs not be discussed further.
- The discussion is terminated due to a lack of time. Elísio Macamo expresses his wish that the overall process has become more transparent to everyone present. Hereby he stresses the commitment needed, which may result in very good opportunities for African Studies at the University of Basel. It is of utmost importance that processes, which were undermining the structure of the ZASB during the last three years be omitted in future.

Basel, 20 December 2017, JG, VA, PS