

BRIAS: Brainstorming on Africa-Related Research

More than 40 Africa researchers from Bayreuth, Ingolstadt, Neu-Ulm, and Würzburg came together for a first workshop of the Bavarian Research Institute of African Studies (BRIAS) in Würzburg. Here they discussed, during one day, their fields of research and talked about possible cooperation projects.



BRIAS Speaker Professor Dymitr Ibriszimow of the University of Bayreuth welcomes everyone to the symposium. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)

The invitation to participate in this first BRIAS status seminar came from the two BRIAS institutions in Würzburg: the Forum Africa Center (FAZ) and the Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC. The meeting served as an opportunity for the presentation of the respective fields of research and to find out possible collaboration projects.

On BRIAS and its Institutions

BRIAS was founded in Bayreuth in February 2014. So far, four Bavarian institutions with Africa-related research projects are part of this network under the guidance of its speaker Prof. Dymitr Ibriszimow:

- The University of Bayreuth with its acknowledged academic focus on Africanology and interdisciplinary African studies, with contributions of all six faculties, documented in the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS) and its more than 100 PhD students, with the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies (BA) and their associated institutions, like the Iwalewahaus and the Ecological Botanical Gardens, and further successful networks – and with the second-largest stock of Africa-related books and other media in Germany;
- The University of Würzburg with its Forum Africa Center (*Forum Afrikazentrum* – FAZ), with strong research projects in the field of arts and medical-scientific works in all of its ten faculties, with the Young Africa Center (*Junges Afrikazentrum* – JAZ), and with the Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC, which presently supports and accompanies about 180 young academics in the Congo;
- The Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences (*Hochschule Neu-Ulm* – HNU), whose focus on Africa studies lies mainly in the field of health management and whose expertise has now also been extended to the fields of Blended Learning and an education on entrepreneurship based on a practical approach;
- and the Technical University Ingolstadt (*Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt* - THI), where – at the Institute for new Energy Systems (InES) – path-breaking technologies for renewable energy systems are elaborated and promoted. THI maintains intense scientific relations in particular with the southern part of Africa.



Professor Gerhard Bringmann, organizer of the meeting and President of BEBUC, chairing the discussions. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)

BRIAS is a multi-disciplinary platform. Its aim is the interlinking of the existing academic competence within Bavarian Africa-related research, the sustainable reinforcement of university cooperation with partners in Africa, the creation of new teaching modules, and



Professor Heiko Paeth, introducing the Forum Afrikazentrum of the University of Würzburg, which he chairs. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)



Professor Elmar Steurer, presenting the projects in the field of health management at the Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)



Professor Christoph Trinkl from the Technical University Ingolstadt, giving a talk on renewable-energy projects in Africa. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)

the development of joint future-oriented projects.

About the Workshop

In order to concentrate and coordinate these fields of work and expertise, and to attain new collaborations and networks, the participating academics presented themselves in a one-day marathon of talks. At this first meeting on Africa research in Bavaria, long lectures were deliberately avoided. More important were discussions, both, in the plenary and in smaller groups. The personal contacts were meant to achieve that questions on Africa should be seen in a multi-disciplinary way, in order to better take into account the complexity of the African continent. With 19 out of 32 talks, there was of course an especially strong participation by the hosts from Würzburg.

The meeting had been organized and planned by Prof. Gerhard Bringmann from the Würzburg Chair of Organic Chemistry I (at the same time member of the FAZ Board and Chairman of BEBUC) together with Julien Bobineau (Young Africa Center), Prof. Horst Beinlich (Egyptology), and Prof. Heiko Paeth (FAZ Speaker).

In his opening speech, Bringmann emphasized the importance of this first status seminar as a unique chance to come to know each other and to profit from the diversity. Alfred Forchel, President of the University of Würzburg, thanked Bringmann for initiating the status seminar. "From this event, which provides a promising further basis for the successful collaboration of the Bavarian Africa initiatives, I expect new synergistic effects," he added. The Speaker of BRIAS, Dymitr Ibrizimow likewise thanked the organizers and added: "Partners have become friends and partnerships have developed into friendships. BRIAS offers a perfect framework for the inner-Bavarian exchange and for research cooperations focused on Africa."

Plans for the future

"As a result of the exchange of knowledge and experience, there will be first clues on collaboration projects, now serving as a starting point for future joint activities – BRIAS grows together!", says Bringmann.

In his closing remarks FAZ Speaker Heiko Paeth expressed the hope that, in the future, similar meetings might take place regularly in alternating places.

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*Meeting in Würzburg in order to come to know each other better:
the participants of the first BRIAS symposium. (Photo: Marco Bosch)*

Links

Links to information on BRIAS:

www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/sonstiges/meldungen/detail/artikel/bayernweit/

www.presse.uni-wuerzburg.de/einblick/single/artikel/bayernweites-afrikanetzwerk-tagte-in-wuerzburg/

Link to the Forum Africa Center: www.afrikazentrum.uni-wuerzburg.de/startseite/

Link to the Young Africa Center: www.afrikazentrum.uni-wuerzburg.de/jaz/

About the information pavilion of the University of Würzburg at the Africa Festival:

www.afrikazentrum.uni-wuerzburg.de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/das_universitaetszelt_auf_dem_africa_festival/

Information on the Scholarship Program BEBUC and on the NGO *Förderverein Uni Kinshasa e.V.*:

<http://www.foerdereverein-uni-kinshasa.de/?lang=en>



*The President of the University of Würzburg, Professor Alfred Forchel,
welcomes the participants of the meeting. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)*



Professor Markus Engstler from biology – here with a book on African sleeping sickness from colonial times – presenting modern concepts in the fight against this deadly disease. As a further illustrative object he had brought living tsetse flies. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)



Patience N. Ache, PhD student in the group of Professor Barbara Sponholz from the Department of Geography and Geology, reports about her thesis on waste recycling in Africa. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)



Professor Chibueze C. Udeani, chairholder of Mission Studies, talks about the courage needed to include the background of individuals as an essential factor into the process of inculturation. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)



Heike Raphael-Hernandez, Professor of American Cultural Studies, speaks about the role of African women writers, film makers, and artists. (Photo: Jan Wendrich)