

*Gesellschaft für Australienstudien: Academic exchange and the
Europe-Asia-Australia axis*
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I have been invited to speak at this forum on *Australia's Engagement with Europe* about the role of the *Gesellschaft für Australienstudien e.V.* and the benefits of

establishing an axis between leading German or, I believe, European, academics and institutions with those in Australia and Asia. That request opens up a vast topic, that is both a challenge and meets with my own interests.

To begin with, let me make several assumptions about the *Australia Centre Europe Ltd.* One could ask why the centre calls itself *Australia Centre*: It does not represent Australia – at least, not in the sense of the German and European public's perception. The name carries connotations that were embodied in the first Potsdam Centre, and, less strongly, in the second.¹ Put briefly, those connotations refer to a broad, multi-disciplinary and comprehensive view of Australia, a comparative angle on Germany (and the wider central European region) and Australia, and the centre's role as a catalyst in the region and for future cooperation with business, industry and policy. Those perspectives, one will notice immediately, were not alien to the mission of the second centre, though it failed to do anything to promote them. The preservation of the old name then opens up the possibility of a wide perspective and the link with concerns such as Australia's *Engagement with Europe*. This *third centre* also seems to have a more efficient new management structure than the second one. That is an asset, as it continues to lobby for links with Higher Education institutions in Europe. It may be more interested in advanced research and technology, less in the *soft subjects*. They should not be excluded as it is them that provide the academic backbone, the stability and, as they themselves look for more pluri-disciplinary research and teaching, they involve the *hard subjects* with their inherent project-dependent instability. Furthermore, the search for an axis, let me call it the "Asia link", between European and Australian institutions, will turn out to be an added value to attract funding. It creates a 'level-playing field', which is important psychologically! Closely related, the European Union has several project frameworks that link Asian research centres with those in Europe. These frameworks are difficult to access from Australia, though Australia is not formally excluded.

I will now position my remarks vis-à-vis the mission of the third centre and ask these questions. First, what is the role of the *Gesellschaft für Australienstudien e.V.* for the *Australia Centre Europe*? Why should it be interested in the *Gesellschaft*? Second, why is it desirable to create a Europe-Australia-Asia axis? And, third, is there anything that could be done immediately? As I will reflect on the position of *GASt*, the *Gesellschaft für Australienstudien e.V.*, I will take this opportunity to make a number of points I find important from my own experiences in matters Australian for the past 21 years.

I will refer to the *Australia Centre Europe* by the acronym ACE – let's hope and wish it will turn out to be an 'ace'. And I will refer to the *Gesellschaft* by *GASt*,

¹ They have been described in detail in a paper of mine and Walter Veit, Monash University (*GASt Newsletter* 17, 2003). That account of the history has prompted a reaction by Professor John Milfull, UNSW, and there is a brief but necessary sequel: both are published in the recent *GASt Newsletter* 18 (2004).

which translates as 'guest' into English. *GUESTs* and *ACEs* should form a successful double!

The *Gesellschaft für Australienstudien e.V.*

GASt was formally established in Bonn in 1989. It was preceded by an informal network, *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Australien*, which held its regular meetings inside the Australian Embassy from 1986. (That was our *dreamtime*, I might say, when the Embassy hosted *Gasts* like us, when ambassadors would sit in on our meetings, bring drinks, and when funds were made available to further Australian Studies at German universities. Alas, that has become a dead past – pure neglect.) The working group had been the result of interdisciplinary initiatives that started around 1982 and were supported by academics from a wide range of disciplines. Like many bilateral academic interests the interest in the *fremde*, the foreign, began with a search for what it was that made Australia look different from other countries or regions in terms of language, literature, history, its topography, fauna or flora. At that stage humanities' subjects dominated the field. The search for, and description and analysis of the *foreign* continue to be deep-seated aspects of research in the Humanities – a driving force that creates and perpetuates the interest in Australia. The working group started to organize bi-annual conferences that have been continued by *GASt*.

The first conference in Blaubeuren (near Ulm) in 1988 took stock and was about "Australian Studies in Germany". 1990 saw a conference in the Alps on "Man and nature in Australia". The 1992 conference took up the theme of Australia looking north to Asia and far west to Europe. The role of Australia being a hub was the key motif in the efforts to create the Potsdam Australia Centre at around the same time. I pass over 1994 and 1996 – both including business and economic perspectives – and come to the Swiss conference on visions about Australia's future. The Asia theme was mentioned. In Austria's Klagenfurt in 2000 we turned to the question of how Australia and Germany deal with their respective pasts – the well-known holocaust theme. 2002 in Trier we came back to Asia and looked at Australia as being located between Asia and the political West. The conference was done in collaboration with Trier's Asia Institute.² Looking at the tables of contents of conference proceedings, one cannot fail to see the broadening scope of *GASt*, way beyond the few arts subjects mentioned earlier.

In 1999 *GASt* held a conference in collaboration with the Australia Centre Potsdam on Australian Studies as a module in tertiary education. It aimed to develop perspectives for multi- and interdisciplinary courses and produced some detailed curricular proposals for a number subjects (ed. by Gerhard Leitner and Bruce

² Incidentally, the Asia-link has a very interesting history and came to the fore in the 1910s when Asian languages were introduced at The University of Sydney, for instance. It came up again in the mid 1930s when Asian languages began to be taught at a Melburnian girls' college. Finally, it emerged in the early 1960s, prior to the lifting of the racially discriminating immigration policies, when, for instance, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation published pronunciation guides on Asian languages.

Bennett, 2000). *Australian Language Matters* (the periodical of *Language in Australia Ltd.*) published my own extended paper on the teaching of Australia's languages as a component of Australian studies.

Since 1988 GAST has published a *Newsletter* which I took over in 2001. Being an annual publication, I introduced a focal theme for each issue – this year it was Australia's dynamism. Heike Joens, an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation grantee reviewed the benefits of Humboldt-funded exchanges between Germany and Australia over a 50-year period. Professor Stilz wrote a report for the Hochschulrektoren Konferenz (HRK). John Milfull from UNSW contributed on the Centre's perspectives. We had contributions from France and other countries.

Next to conferences and publications, I must mention the association's electronic data base on experts and centres with specific Australian-expertise. It was initiated by Professor Manfred Brusten, University of Wuppertal, and involved for some time the Potsdam Centre. It was published in *GAST Newsletter* 15 (2001) and is waiting to be updated. A similar study on social sciences by Professor Brusten was published in *GAST Newsletter* 16 (2002). Given the development of the *GAST Newsletter*, we have renamed it *Zeitschrift für Australienstudien (ZfA)* in 2005.

I should briefly mention a few activities where members of *GAST* were involved:

- A symposium on Germany and Australia: media images in the digital age hosted by the ABC (Sydney) and Deutsche Welle in 1998
- Various (often popular) events such as a conference on Aboriginal Australians held by the *Evangelische Akademie Iserlohn*, the German section of the Association for Endangered Peoples, etc.
- The participation of GAST experts in a delegation of the HRK to Australia
- A 5-day event of the Association for Endangered People's in Berlin in May this year with GAST experts
- A contribution to the President of the Deutsche Bundesrat's journey to Australia in 2003

Somewhat outside *GAST* were, as Walter Veit and I explained in our history of the Potsdam Centre (2003 and 2004), attempts to create a multi-disciplinary Australia centre that could act as a catalyst of research and teaching in the Berlin region and branch out into Germany and Central Europe – the new EU member states. The initiative relied heavily on the axis function that Australia pushed so forcefully under Prime Minister Keating.³ These initiatives included several high-level "Australia Day" symposia that attracted national audiences and led to political exchanges between German and Australian politicians, etc. I might mention, for instance, the visits of the Berlin Commissioner of Ethnic Affairs and of the Senator for Urban Planning (Berlin), Volker Hassemer, to Australia in the early 1990.

³ I had the honour to meet him on the occasion of a state visit and a state function at Schloß Charlottenburg. I might add in passing, at the very early stage of the initiative to develop an Australia Centre, it was to be called *Australia-Asia-Pacific Centre*, with the leading hand behind this concept being a political scientist (see Leiter/Veit 2003).

The Europe-Australia-Asia axis

The Germany-Australia-Asia link is the second point I was asked to address. By Asia I mean knowledge and skills in Asia's economies, business cultures, political structure and history, languages, the role of civil society, etc. The Asia-link from a German angle had been around for a long time and many *GAST* members have been active in research and teaching about Asian countries. The link has recently led to the establishment of Asian-focused academic courses such as at the Ruhr-University Bochum, which offers a B.A. on political science and economy with a focus on East Asia. Many courses are offered at universities and/or *Fachhochschulen* or Technical Colleges of Further Education (TAFEs) and they are becoming ever more popular.

A serious engagement with Asia, a Europe-Australia-Asia axis, would thus be well-prepared in Germany (and Europe at large) and enormously welcome. There appear to be three strong research areas:

Areas that emanate from Australia-related comparative research themes

These themes cannot be surveyed in detail, but it is obvious that there are many specific areas that can fruitfully be carried out on a tri-lateral basis. Let me mention three. The first has to do with themes directly related to Asia:

- peace studies, religious studies: multi-culturalism, multi-religious states like Malaysia or Singapore that are heavily Islamic
- sociology, etc.: the effects of migration from Asia to Australia, the USA and Europe during and since the 19th century
- economic history: the development of the economic area linking Asia, the Arab world and East Africa during the pre- and post-colonial world. I will just mention, in passing, the role of the Dutch and British East Asia companies, the limitations on trade imposed on Australia, etc. Along the same lines, one may think of the growth of a cross-Asia-Pacific trade zone since the early 9th century.
- as a corollary, interests in dependent policies of higher education, media, language policies, are being pursued in disciplines like education, linguistics, etc.
- literature and philosophy: it is well-known that a number of Australian writers such as Mudrooroo have taken inspiration from Buddhism and other Asian religions

Increasingly, German political association such as the *Gesellschaft für Wissenschaft und Politik*, the *Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik*, etc., are active in this field and exchange specialists with the region.

Secondly, research areas that have to do with the scientific proficiency of German and European and Australian universities that are unspecific with regard to any world region:

- environmental studies, afforestation (in Asia, Australia, Europe). etc.
- security, civil society
- or even human history, archeology (such as on rock paintings), pre-historic migrations

The third area is related to global topics, so to speak, where international experts cooperate across national boundaries:

- medical and other IT-capabilities (e.g. at University of Heidelberg thanks to the Fraunhofer Gesellschaft – not represented here)

If one were to pursue a German/European-Australia-Asia axis, one of the benefits it would lead to is to strengthen regional-oriented comparative research and to benefit synergies between different disciplines. (In passing, multiculturalism as a theme in Civic Society and its structures would involve a wide range of social science and humanities subjects and be open to economics from the perspective of managerial structures, human resource development, market analyses, etc.)

Let me come to funding return to funding mechanisms. I know that the Humboldt Foundation and others are beginning to look intensively into special funding programs for South-East Asia and ASEAN nations. The *Fraunhofer Gesellschaft*, for instance, supports projects in medical information technology – recently in Heidelberg – that involve Asian scholars. A particularly persuasive instrument for funding is naturally the European Union. There is a range of very recent documents such as

- *A new partnership with South East Asia (Com 2003 399/4)*
- *Strategy paper and indicative programme for multi-country programmes in Asia. 2005-2006. Issued by DIRECTORATE Asia.*
- *The EC-Malaysia country strategy paper. 2002-2006*
- *National indicative programme. 2005-2006. Malaysia*

These outline the Commission's analyses of Europe's interest in ASEAN, SAARC and East Asian countries. I cannot re-iterate here all the points mentioned but would pick out these:

- the EU and ASEAN are seen as showing clear parallels of deepening regional integration
- the EU and SAARC are not seen as such as yet, but the EU may play a role in conflict management in the area
- ASEM is mechanism to include the whole Asian region into EU-Asia programs

Apart from political, economic, and global themes, higher education, S&R and R&D come out strongly and several funding mechanisms can be identified, e.g.

- the ASEAN-EU University Network Programme
- the ASEF (Asia Europe Foundation) with an interest in cultural and intellectual exchanges
- the (EC) Higher Education programme (to be started now) that will foster human resources and institutional networking

These mechanisms can contribute to project funding, conference organizations, etc. Of course, the programs are not open to all subject areas; there is a distinct focus on political, economic and technological fields – the hard sciences. But there are remarks on areas like civil society, governance, etc., that may permit the humanities to come in.

While what I have said so far concerns the EU and Asia, there is a mechanism that would allow other countries such as Australia to come in: *International Research and Europe. A window on the world* (2000) shows that the EU is open to research partnerships with institutions outside it. The *International Role of Community Research* (INCO2) "promotes and supports essential, effective research collaboration between European scientists and their colleagues worldwide" (p 3). Australia's access is limited. As a non-targeted country Australia can take part on a project-by-project basis, but normally without funding. It is essential for Australian money being (made) available for a Europe-Australia-Asia axis.

I wish to conclude by saying that the Europe-Asia-Australia axis that there would be a great interest in an "engagemt between European and Asia-Pacific nations". More concretely, I can see an affinity between the stipulations of EU funding frameworks and the typology of research mentioned earlier. They may be more heavily weighted towards science and technology, global security and social issues, such as drug trafficking, terrorism and poverty, health, etc., but civil society structures (and multiculturalism) surely find a place.

Practical proposal to the Group of Eight.

Having had the benefit of a most generous research grant from the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, whose counterpart is being monitored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, in 1995-96, I was behind a proposal to the Humboldt Foundation to award its Research Prize to Professor Michael Clyne, now at The University of Melbourne. Professor Clyne is, as some of you will know, a leading international Germanist and was awarded the *Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm Prize* in, I believe, 2001. He is a leading figure on the international scene in language contact studies, second language acquisition, second language teaching and language policy. He was awarded several honorary Ph.D.s (one from the Ludwig Maximilian University at Munich) and national awards. The Humboldt Foundation awarded him that prize and we are now involved in a comparative analysis of language and language-oriented educational policies in Germany, seen from within the EU framework, and Australia. One of the central goals will be to feed into language and educational policies in Germany. Professor Clyne will be hosted by the Free University Berlin.

During recent discussions, we considered the possibility of widening the comparative angle to ASEAN countries and especially to the University of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, which has a renowned intercultural centre that aims to ease communication between, say, Christian and Islamic nations, amongst other goals. It is also involved in language educational policies in a multilingual and multi-cultural nation, which is a member state of ASEAN.

Finding a balance between national multilingualism with a possibility of a region-oriented multilingualism of ASEAN is a daunting task. The European Union with its

region-oriented language policies and the Australian region-oriented policies are ideal points of comparison, we think.

Closing remarks

In line with what I was asked to do, I tried to summarize some of the major activities of *GASt* in the domain of Australian-German academic relations and regarding themes that focus on Australia's position in relation to Asia. My conclusion was that *GASt* is undoubtedly a very potent partner for *ACE*. I looked in greater detail at the German interest in Asian topics and the benefits of creating a Germany/Europe-Asia-Australia axis and pointed to number of very pertinent comparative theme as well as to others where experts from the three regions can profitably collaborate. I showed that there are EU funding mechanisms that will make it attractive for Australia to get involved or *engaged*. What is missing at this session, and I pose that as a question to the chairman, is what is the specific interest of Australia or, prominently, the *Group of Eight* in raising this theme here and what Australian funding mechanisms there are that can promote collateral projects.