

The Role of Institutes for Advanced Study in Promoting Internationalization

Dorothea Rüländ and Sonja Gräber-Magocsi

In 2021, the German Science and Humanities Council published a study on the Development Perspectives of Institutes for Advanced Study (IASs) in Germany, concluding that IASs have come to form an integral part of the German science system. Since the establishment of the first IAS in Princeton in 1930, there have been subsequent founding waves that responded to the specific needs of the respective time periods.

Worldwide, there are now more than 150 IASs altogether, spread over five continents. A common characteristic of all the institutes is that they try to foster innovation and reforms in the field of science and scholarship. They want to attract excellent researchers from all over the world by offering them free space to develop new ideas. In Germany,

Abstract

Since 1930, more than 150 Institutes for Advanced Study have been founded all over the world. They have a common role in the global science system in that they all aim to promote innovation and free spaces for researchers. The future of internationalization in research and higher education might lie in a strong focus on the development of global networks.

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the most prominent for a long time was the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, which was joined by a wave of new institutes established through funding by a top level research competition, the Excellence Initiative.

Internationalization of Research—The Missing Link?

In the past decades, support of individual career paths as well as participation in the global competition for the most promising researchers have been high on the agenda of IASs, promoting internationalization. Is this the final destination of IASs as well? Or is there still more in the pipeline? Today, as far as research on internationalization is concerned, there is a strong focus on mobility and research output, but not so much on the processes of internationalization in research. Considering that all the grand challenges that we are facing today can only be tackled through international cooperation, this omission is quite surprising. One explanation might be that the majority of national funding organizations still think and operate mostly within bilateral (and less within multilateral) structures. Another reason could be that individual mobility and publications are simply far easier to measure and quantify than the multidimensional effects of scientific networks.

IASs—Promoters of Global Networks

What does that mean for the future and the potential of IASs? The overarching issue and the mission of IASs today might be to act as platforms and to offer spaces to build networks for all the urgent topics that need solving. By definition, IASs are small entities bringing together researchers at different career stages, and of different nationalities and academic disciplines, who live and work together without any other obligation than to pursue their own ideas. They build small communities, socializing with one another, asking each other questions, exchanging ideas, and forging new transdisciplinary relations. Together, they act as a kind of incubator for new networks, which hopefully will last much longer than the fellows' individual stays at their respective IASs. This is an investment in the future, something that universities today may not always be able to offer because of all the obligations that today's scientists and scholars have to fulfill in research, teaching, and administration.

The Hamburg Institute for Advanced Study

Another conclusion of the Council's survey is that this type of fertile atmosphere will not develop spontaneously out of thin air, but needs a certain framework. Each IAS has to develop its own profile and highlight the added value that it has to offer. In our case at the Hamburg Institute for Advanced Study (HIAS), the foremost distinction is its unusual structure: HIAS is an independent membership organization of nine local institutions of higher education (publicly and privately funded universities and research institutions), with strong financial commitment from the city of Hamburg. This offers the chance to cover nearly any kind of field, including the arts. The focus lies on inviting excellent researchers to Hamburg at different stages of their careers, as well as artists and cultural professionals from all over the world, and to provide them with the opportunity to build new networks, or develop existing ones, by matching them with a cooperation partner from one of HIAS' member organizations. This helps fellows to integrate into the local academic landscape right from the beginning of their stay, and is intended to facilitate new cooperative relationships.

As an additional effect, this networking offers outreach opportunities beyond academia because local counterparts often provide access to their own networks, thus opening doors to the local community and contributing to more science communication and an increased understanding of science.

The whole endeavor is flanked by an evaluation process that follows up on the output of each fellowship. From the beginning, an alumni concept is needed to make sure that all of these cooperative developments will prove to be sustainable. Additional elements might make sense, for example, offering fellows the chance to invite doctoral students or postdocs for shorter periods of time in order to work on a proposal for a joint research project and to broaden the network.

Networks of the Future

Internationalization is much more than just mobility; it is needed on all levels of higher education and research. Students have to learn how to work in an intercultural environment; they have to start right from the beginning to build their own networks. This process will never come to an end, on the contrary. In the long run, there will be a stronger focus on the internationalization of research. The networking taking place at IASs can promote cooperation in two directions: between the fellows, who are staying together and who are encouraged to develop new transdisciplinary ideas (that is, beyond their respective fields of research), as well as between the different fellows and their counterparts at the local academic institutions. Therefore, IASs are indeed an integral part of the (German) science system and contribute to the internationalization of research. ▲

Dorothea Rüländ is secretary-general of the Hamburg Institute for Advanced Study (HIAS) in Hamburg, Germany. Email: dorothea.rueland@hias-hamburg.de.

Sonja Gräber-Magocsi is responsible for fellow management and academic coordination at HIAS. Email: sonja.graeber-magocsi@hias-hamburg.de.