

Science meets society

The social responsibility of research, teaching and innovation...

Never before has science had a greater and faster changing impact on people's lives. In our globalised world, it becomes increasingly important to keep up to date with the latest developments. In our highly specialised knowledge society, it becomes more and more difficult to gain a differentiated and informed view of the 'whole picture', given the complex data streams we are exposed to. Interdisciplinary knowledge and interdisciplinary competence, cultural knowledge, science communication, participation and social commitment are terms that therefore grow in importance and that also come into the spotlight at the university level. As responsible corporate institutions, research universities experience new challenges: they are expected to provide innovative and highly specialised new and robust knowledge; unintended social and cultural effects are to be adequately anticipated; and both scientific communities and the broader public are to be involved in communication processes. With social media, spontaneous protest movements and the increasingly recognised potentials of open access, these are truly invigorating and demanding challenges.

Diverse and interdisciplinary, sustainable and intercultural: The ZAK | Centre for Cultural and General Studies at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) tries to tackle some of these challenges. It is a central scientific institution, combining teaching, research and public science under one roof. Interdisciplinary exchange within KIT is supported through interdisciplinary and intercultural education. Additionally, dialogue between science and society raises awareness for differing disciplinary and societal cultures. Thus, the ZAK provides



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central services to encourage participation and to support the social responsibility of KIT in research, teaching and innovation.

Public Science

In concrete terms, this means building a direct contact with citizens. Many people associate university research with the image of an ivory tower in which professors and scientists engage in their research for many years, while they are isolated from the 'rest of the world'. The ZAK actively tries to counter this by making complex topics accessible to a broader audience. Associated with this is the objective to let the public participate in discussion about the latest findings and consequences of scientific action and to impart the necessary critical knowledge for this. Students and scientists are encouraged to reflect on issues relating to 'science in society' and 'society in science'. The centre has been host to numerous conferences, symposia, panel discussions and lectures with internationally renowned experts. These events are distinguished by an interdisciplinary perspective on science, politics, culture and economy.

Karlsruhe Dialogues

One example of such an event is the international Karlsruhe Dialogues, which are organised by the centre once a year in cooperation with cultural institutions and the City of Karlsruhe. In a reflective discourse as well as in aesthetic and artistic ways, they address a topic of current relevance. The congress is not a symposium on specialised issues. Its methodology differs from the usual procedural manner of such events. It includes presentations on basic principles, short statements, papers and discussions. Additionally, it features performances from the arts – including film, reading, music and theatre. The combination of a high key interdisciplinary scientific conference for the general public with provocative aesthetic contributions to a universal topic makes the Karlsruhe Dialogues unique. With this concept, ZAK tries to break out of deadlocked ways of thinking to support a creative quest for new ways and insights of solving controversial issues with regard to society. In February 2012, the 16th Karlsruhe Dialogues will deal with the question of new risks in a globalised world and their reception.

Projects

Insights and questions raised through public science overlap with the research projects pursued by the ZAK. Topics within the fields of science communication, globalisation and integration processes, cultural change and technology as well as cultural diversity and cultural heritage are the main subjects of its research activities. ZAK recognises the positive and critical potential of cultural pluralism. It incorporates the principles of the UNESCO 'Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions', which was ratified by the German government in 2007.

InsideScience

The DFG-funded project (DFG, German Research Foundation) 'InsideScience' concerning public science in Collaborative Research Centres directs its attention towards the experimentation of new forms of knowledge transfer that puts research in a social context – especially science films, which are suitable for the internet stand at the core of the project. For dissemination, InsideScience uses the semantic network and thus creates a learning-oriented area of knowledge. Involving media training, the project enables researchers to see the 'other side'. The objective is to enable young scientists to engage in discussion on cultural, ethical and social aspects that are not normally raised within the context of their normal specialised research routines.

KÜdKa

At KÜdKa, the Competence Centre for Digital Cultural Heritage Karlsruhe coordinated by ZAK – a cooperation of the KIT, the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG), ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe and the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research (ISI) – aims to develop practical solutions for the long-term preservation of digital cultural heritage and to offer these solutions by means of consulting with institutions that deal with the preservation of digital memory. In particular, KÜdKa is looking at new measures to



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sufficiently conserve complex research data and to develop appropriate means of access. The interdisciplinary competence centre, which combines the competencies of 15 facilities of the KIT plus partner institutions, is dedicated to problem-oriented basic research and transdisciplinary knowledge transfer.

Hyderabad

A very different, yet no less exciting, project is followed by the ZAK in cooperation with the University of Hyderabad. In 2011, a project was started with the purpose of promoting the preservation and development of Buddhist sites in the federal state of Andhra Pradesh, India. KIT provides the appropriate technical expertise in this project, for example, regarding the digital (-geometric) collection and documentation of buildings or historical sites. The aim is both to discuss the methodological-technical requirements for the sites' scientific record and to discuss the social, economic and cultural conditions for cultural heritage, and thereby to work out a cornerstone for a sustainable development of the region.

Teaching

Interdisciplinary teaching is a central activity of the centre. In a rapidly changing world, the teaching programme of the ZAK gains new relevance. Open to all, interdisciplinary additional qualifications for students enable the acquisition of orientational knowledge, and, at the same time, offer practice and job-oriented skills that are beneficial for study, work

and society. Innovative teaching and learning modules support the crossing of one's own discipline in terms of a complementary adoption of cultural or scientific literacy. The Additional Studies 'Applied Cultural Studies' is just one example of the ZAK's teaching activities that addresses, in particular, students of engineering and economics.

International Network General Studies

In 2009, the ZAK gave the impetus for the founding of the International Network General Studies, a think tank with more than 30 universities and colleges. The primary goal is to discuss the social relevance of the General Study Programmes, as well as the educational policy challenges pertaining to them in the reform context, to express recommendations for further action and to demonstrate just how much variety the programmes



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have to offer. Thus, the ZAK looks outside the German-speaking community and commits itself to a responsible global engineering.



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Competence Field Cultural Heritage
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