



Beyond the Obvious and Against the Tide

Tenth Anniversary of ZAK – Center for
Cultural Science and Studium Generale

BY MATTHIAS KEHLE // TRANSLATION: HEIDI KNIERIM // PHOTOGRAPHS: FELIX GRÜNSCHLOSS



For one decade, ZAK (Zentrum für Angewandte Kulturwissenschaft und Studium Generale – for Cultural Science and Studium Generale) has been reconciling interdisciplinary teaching, cultural research, and public science. This most unique mixture is mainly attributed to Professor Caroline Y. Robertson-von Trotha, who remembers well its beginnings almost thirty years ago. “Then,” she

smiles “today’s well-known ‘extended concept of culture’ was still being discussed.”

At first more like an interdisciplinary discussion platform, the research unit founded by some relevant researchers from Universität Karlsruhe soon developed into the “Interdepartmental Institute for Applied Cultural Studies” (Interfakultatives

Institut für Angewandte Kulturwissenschaft). From 1990 onwards, students from all departments were offered the opportunity to do supplementary studies. Professor Robertson-von Trotha recalls that whereas humanists acquired knowledge of cultural economics, economists were interested in cultural studies, for example taking seminars on media or cultural institutions and visiting the Karlsruhe



Ihre Vorträge zogen viele Zuhörer in ihren Bann: Politiker Cem Özdemir, Elsbeth Stern (Psychologin), Helga Nowotny (Soziologin und Wissenschaftsforscherin), Schriftsteller Ilija Trojanow (obere Reihe v.l.), Philosoph Richard David Precht, Diplomat Shimon Stein, ZAK-Direktorin Caroline Y. Robertson-von Trotha und Soziologe Zygmunt Bauman (untere Reihe v.l.)

Their presentations captivated a large audience: Politician Cem Özdemir, Elsbeth Stern (psychologist), Helga Nowotny (sociologist and science researcher), writer Ilija Trojanow (top row from left to right), philosopher Richard David Precht, diplomat Shimon Stein, ZAK director Caroline Y. Robertson-von Trotha, and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (bottom, from left to right)

libraries, archives or museums. From the beginning, a good two-thirds of all participating students came from the fields of engineering or economics.

The present-day director, Professor of Sociology Dr. Caroline Robertson-von Trotha, was there from the beginning. She even witnessed one of the most important steps, i.e., the integration of General Studies twelve years ago. In July 2002, ZAK was founded officially as a central institution of the then university. The three pillars ZAK rests on are shown in its logo to symbolize the mission of the expanding center: Research, teaching, and (as coined by Professor Robertson-von Trotha) "public science." In addition to one permanent research assistant, ZAK employs numerous third-party-financed collaborators.

Today, public science is one of the center's flagships featuring, for instance, the Karlsruhe Dialogues (Karlsruher Gespräche). Since 1997, this well-established, once-a-year event has been offering lectures and workshops on topical social issues. Whereas, the taboo of death and the different cultures of death were discussed in the Dialogues

of 2006, this year's event on "New Obscurities in a Globalized World" dealt with, among other things, the financial crisis, the protests, and the idea of democracy in the Arab world. According to Caroline Robertson-von Trotha, the Karlsruhe Dialogues have become ever more international. In February next year, Roland Robertson, a leading sociologist who introduced the idea of "glocalization" (a neologism made up of the words "globalization" and "localization") into the scientific debate, will take part as a keynote speaker.

Another element of public science at ZAK is the traditional general-studies symposium "Colloquium Fundamentale des Studium Generale" whose regular lectures and argumentative discussions are open to all members of the KIT and to the interested public. "We believe that it is important to acquaint people with the science taught at KIT," Scottish-born Professor Robertson-von Trotha says. In line with this motivation, "KIT im Rathaus," an event that takes place at the city hall in Karlsruhe, once per semester features one KIT Research Focus: Optics and Photonics will be introduced in January 2013 through multidisciplinary papers from the

fields of physics, chemistry, biology, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering.

The 220-page program for the winter semester offers students an extremely wide variety of courses to be taken at the ZAK. The supplementary "Applied Cultural Studies" courses held by KIT researchers and by other experts range from a seminar dealing with "Galileo Galilei as a Technical Philosopher and Scientific Rhetorician" through to a workshop on "Practical Culture Management." There are indeed ample opportunities for KIT students to look beyond the obvious. And be rewarded with certificates for having acquired additional qualifications in almost any subject taught at KIT.

Research, another pillar of the ZAK, is dealt with, for example, by a project which together with Technische Universität Darmstadt and Technische Universität München studies the key qualifications at the universities of technology. ZAK director Caroline Robertson-von Trotha says that "among others, it was found that among engineers, knowledge of the present social issues is becoming ever more important."

The DFG-funded project "Inside Science," once again, is part of the public-science flagship. Since communication between science and society is becoming ever more diverse, ZAK has produced about forty video clips suitable for YouTube and with integrated Web 2.0 functions where researchers elucidate their work in a generally understandable way. Among these clips is a diverting film of about 20 minutes on the field of theoretical particle physics.

Another significant research project joining ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe – Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe), HFG (Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe – Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design) and ZAK is the long-time preservation of electronic data. "After all," Professor Robertson-von Trotha explains "it is important to still be able to retrieve archived knowledge, research data, and digital art in hundred years from now."

The fact that ZAK is indispensable today to KIT's academic activities is due not only to the farsightedness of several professors thirty years ago but also owes to the persistence and passion with which Caroline Robertson-von Trotha has pursued her vision of interdisciplinary and intercultural studies. ■

Contact: zak@zak.kit.edu

Über den Tellerrand

Zehn Jahre „Zentrum für Angewandte Kulturwissenschaft“

Unter diesem Hut finden sich viele Dinge: Seit einem Jahrzehnt bietet das ZAK fächerübergreifende Lehre, betreibt kulturwissenschaftliche Forschung und engagiert sich für Öffentliche Wissenschaft. Zu verdanken ist diese einzigartige Mischung vor allem ZAK-Direktorin Professor Caroline Y. Robertson-von Trotha. Sie erinnert sich gut an die inzwischen fast dreißig Jahre zurückreichenden Anfänge. „Da wurde der sogenannte 'erweiterte Kulturbegriff' diskutiert, heute eine Selbstverständlichkeit“, sagt sie. Offiziell gegründet und als zentrale Einrichtung an der damaligen Universität Karlsruhe angesiedelt, wurde das ZAK aber erst im Juli 2002.

Die Öffentliche Wissenschaft – einen Begriff, den Robertson-von Trotha maßgeblich geprägt hat – ist eines der Aushängeschilder des ZAK. Allen voran sind dies die „Karlsruher Gespräche“, die sich in Vorträgen und Workshops mit aktuellen gesellschaftlichen Fragen auseinandersetzen. „Wichtig ist uns, dass wir die Wissenschaft aus der Universität nach außen tragen“, so die ZAK-Direktorin. So wird in der Reihe „KIT im Rathaus“ etwa einmal pro Semester ein Forschungsschwerpunkt präsentiert, 2013 ist es das Thema „Optik und Photonik“. Außerordentlich vielfältig ist das Lehrangebot, die zweite Säule des ZAK, besonders beim Begleitstudium Angewandte Kulturwissenschaft. Das Studium Generale ermöglicht Einblicke in nahezu jedes Thema, das am KIT gelehrt wird. Bleibt noch die dritte ZAK-Säule, die interdisziplinäre Forschung. Im Rahmen des DFG-Projekts „Inside Science“ wurden mit rund 40 Kurzfilmen neue Formen der Wissenschaftspräsentation entwickelt, in denen Forscher ihr Fachgebiet allgemein verständlich erklären.

HEILBRONN
www.youtube.com/user/stadtheilbronn

**Entdecke den
Wirtschaftsstandort Heilbronn.**
*Dynamisch, modern, zukunftsorientiert!
Create your Business!*

Infos zum Standort Heilbronn:
 Tel. 07131 / 56-22 77
 E-Mail: wirtschaftsfoerderung@stadt-heilbronn.de



 Stadt Heilbronn Heilbronn-Franken
 Baden-Württemberg