

EADI Acceptance Speech for Presidency
By Henning Melber
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Dear members of the EADI community,

many thanks to all of you, who expressed confidence in my ability to execute this office of EADI presidency for the next three years. It will be a hard act to follow Isa Baud and her team. They deserve credit and profound thanks for a rock solid performance during the terms in office. Vice President Jürgen Wiemann will recognize Isa's contribution in more adequate detail at the new Executive Committee's first meeting tomorrow. I would like to thank Gilles Carbonnier, Sergio Vazquez and Petr Pavlik as outgoing Vice Presidents and Treasurer respectively for their valuable services. I deeply appreciate and respect the substantial part of and contribution to EADI's success by the members of its Secretariat. I would like to thank all of you led by Susanne von Itter for your selfless engagement and look forward to collaborate closely with you in my new position. The continued support by my predecessor is comforting. I am also pleased that Laura Camfield and Jürgen Wiemann are willing to serve another term as Vice Presidents. At the same time, I am delighted that Uma Kothari and Katja Bender have accepted my invitation to join the management group as new Vice Presidents, strengthening the agenda I would like to advocate and implement the next years.

The EADI Executive had requested the presidential candidates earlier on to share their reflections on the main challenges facing a European Association such as ours. As I stated then, the current policy climate in large parts of Europe and elsewhere is not conducive to committed scholarship in Development and Area Studies guided by a notion of solidarity to meet the local and global challenges. Funding becomes increasingly scarce. The criteria to measure 'impact' and other performance related results limit the scope for 'blue sky research'. The new reference points created by the Sustainable Development Goals add to a well meaning but nonetheless limiting agenda. It risks putting research into a straight jacket of the defined silos. But thinking ahead of the curve is needed to find ways out of the tunnel visions misunderstood as 'development'. I trust that EADI's main asset, the Working Groups, will visibly active contribute to such a project beyond the day-to-day agenda. Practically oriented research is good and necessary, but not enough.

EADI institutions and individual members have done and must continue to do more than to reproduce and reaffirm the mainstream approaches. We must advocate alternatives based on global partnerships with as little asymmetric distortion as possible, despite the continued hierarchies structurally embedded in our unequal world. This does not mean that we distance us from dominant spheres of societies and in global governance. But the challenge is to occupy space, which seeks to bring non-conformist approaches to the attention and consideration of policy makers.

EADI should promote through sound research convincingly a better understanding among different players in the developmental arena. The connections to public and policy related institutions as potential funders and clients remain relevant and of a

strategic necessity. A positioning in this context is therefore an ongoing challenge in promoting closer collaboration among various stakeholders in Development and Area Studies. We should however not comfortably maintain a status quo, but rather seek to bridge a generational gap, aiming beyond establishment both within our own ranks as well as in the environment in which we operate trying to make a difference.

We need new ideas and experiences from those exposed to more difficult working environments than those many of us from the older generation had the privilege to enjoy. Forms and substance of knowledge production need to be interrogated. EADI should be a forum for self-critical explorations into what 'development' could or should mean and which consequences such insights have. We should be intellectually as well as politically inspiring for those promoting a fairer world. As part of such aspirations, strategic partnerships with institutions and advocacy groups in the world should be further pursued to contribute towards a global social contract truly 'development' oriented in terms of justice, social rights and a decent living in dignity without fear.

The shrinking space civil society organizations in numerous countries are currently confronted with is among the indicators that a civic rights culture is under stress. According to a recent survey of the global civil society umbrella organization CIVICUS only three per cent of the world's population, living in some twenty countries, have access to civic rights safeguarded by the state. Meanwhile, there is a correlation between such civic space, social justice and inequality: open societies are more equal. - A reminder that 'development' is not a neutral process, but utmost political.

EADI deserves to be recognized as a credible, value-based organization, which stimulates efforts to limit the risks of stagnation in the spheres of development related paradigms. Through such interventions, EADI should position itself more visibly and self-confident on the map of development related policy and research not only within Europe.

In her acceptance speech as President Isa Baud had pointed out six years ago: "EADI has shown that it can adapt to changing circumstances in a polycentric world and take up the opportunities they offer. Linking researchers and policy-makers, and civic organizations, is one of its strength." Let us continue to build on this strength in combination with visions our world needs to survive.

As Albert Einstein once more than quipped: "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." But let us be aware that this is wide open to misunderstandings or misappropriations. Tellingly, Donald Trump had tweeted this quote already on 3rd August 2015. It is a sobering reminder, that self-proclaimed new thinking can be very backward minded, anachronistic, and part of the problem instead of its solution.

In a Europe – and in fact a world - in which values are contested, EADI has to reassess and to reconfirm its value based scholarly endeavors. We need to be academically sound and rigorous. But we should not be neutral. As an agency, we should advocate specific values and take sides. Empathy, passion and compassion matter. – As scholars,

we are also human beings. Development as understood in the global normative frameworks considered to be social contracts – though hardly recognized and implemented by those in power - is not neutral. Let us accept the challenges of engaging scholarship promoting a “yes” to all forms of life on the only planet we have. As Frantz Fanon put it already in the then less gender sensitive but truly humanist perspective in “Black Skin, White Masks”, originally published in 1952: “man is a *yes*. *Yes* to love. *Yes* to generosity. But man is also a *no*. *No* to scorn of man. *No* to degradation of man. *No* to exploitation of man. *No* to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.”

While we should say no and believe in “do no harm”, harm to earth (and, by implication, to us) in a self-inflicted form of reproduction in the Anthropocene happens through us. It is a reminder that we cannot transcend our limitations or our reliance on the environment, be it animals, plants or minerals, and not least air and water. We can only learn to adapt and live preferably in harmony with nature. What could be a nobler goal for Development Studies, than to promote a kind of development, understood as a way to ultimately stop the race against the wall in a cul-de-sac. A rat race, which based on a human centered obsession reduces the totality of our world to the status of an environment suiting some more privileged members of humanity – thereby not only promoting rather sooner than later the extinction of the human species, but the end of all life on our planet.

EADI through its institutional and individual members hopefully will be able to play a role in seeking viable, truly sustainable alternatives, not least by encouraging robust individual scrutiny among scholars not only in Europe, to explore and question our socialization, mindset, values and practices. To investigate, if these are indeed compatible with the new social contract required – and if not, to dare contributing to change by changes in our own perceptions and activities in the first place. That is “development” in a very fundamental and personal way too.

Let me end with the words of Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, who was among the visionaries also in terms of development. On 15 May 1956 he warned on occasion of the 180th anniversary of the Virginia Declaration of Rights: “It is when we all play safe that we create a world of the utmost insecurity. It is when we all play safe that fatality will lead us to our doom. It is ‘in the dark shade of courage’ alone, that the spell can be broken.”

I wish us all in EADI such courage.

Thank you.