

Report on the "Induction Week for the 3rd Doctoral Cycle", European PhDnet "Literary and Cultural Studies"

Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, 29-31 January 2014

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On Wednesday, the 29th of January, the "Induction Week" started in the building of the Graduate Center for the Study of Culture (GCSC) with a warm welcome to all PhD candidates and continued with mutual acknowledgments by ANSGAR NÜNNING (Giessen) and the PhD-Cordinator NORA BERNING (Giessen). Then, MICHAEL BASSELER (Giessen) presented the



PhDnet, which is connected to the GCSC and the International PhD Programme Literary and Cultural Studies (IPP). As a next step we learned about the international partner institutions of the PhDnet: HETA PYRHÖNEN (Helsinki) presented the 'Finnish Graduate School of Literary Studies', ALEXANDRA STROHMAIER (Graz) talked about the 'Doctoral Studies Program at the University of Graz', ELISABETH WÅGHÄLL NIVRE (Stockholm) informed us about the 'Doctoral Studies Program at the University of Stockholm' and ISABEL GIL (Lisbon) reported on 'The Lisbon Consortium at the Catholic University of Lisbon'. Afterwards, we had a chance to get to know our fellow doctoral students from the five member universities during a coffee break. From the very first moment we could feel the international atmosphere and already experience the true meaning of the "Liebig Principle": first, research training through research combined with individual and collaborative research; secondly, the continuous effort to translate one's own research to others. In the evening, Nora Berning informed us about the next procedures for Cotutelle agreements with the universities and we finished off with a joint dinner.

"Trans/national Approaches to the Study of Literature and Culture"
– A Keynote by Ansgar Nünning

On Thursday, the 30th of January, Ansgar Nünning gave his inspiring keynote lecture on "Trans/national Approaches to the Study of Literature and Culture: National Traditions, Intellectual Styles and Transnational Perspectives". He compared the English and the German academic culture by focusing on the political aspect in the British Cultural Studies on the one hand, and foregrounding the theoretical framework in the German "Kulturwissenschaften" on the other. Furthermore, he explained the different historical backgrounds and understandings of the concept of culture in the British context and compared those to the "Kulturbegriff" from a German perspective, thereby following the propositions of Andreas Reckwitz. Ansgar Nünning concluded with some remarks about the different ways of standardizing and evaluating research in both countries; he encouraged us to exchange ideas and strategies, and practice a new style by translating and learning from each other inside the international Phdnet. Subsequently, seven young researchers presented their research topics to the affiliated professors and all other participants. Amongst other aspects they explained their main research questions as well as their key concepts. At the end of the day we had broadened our understanding of the concept of culture by having encountered various themes, from Acoustic Literature to Afro-Caribbean and Portuguese literature, as well as from questions about the representation of identity or madness to topics regarding biological policies.

"How to Evaluate Research in Cultural and Narrative Studies?"

– A Master Class by Roy Sommer

As a great finale ROY SOMMER (Wuppertal) presented his master class on "Quality, Standards, Relevance: How to Evaluate Research in Cultural and Narrative Studies". Mainly referring to Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), he gave a very lively and illustrative talk about the different essentials in humanities and natural sciences, especially regarding concreteness and status of quality standards. Talking of "risky thinking", he highlighted amongst others that natural scientists predominantly solve problems whereas humanities scholars in contrast demonstrate the complexity of things and phenomena.

On Friday, the 31st of January, we continued with the presentations of the PhD-candidates. Our intellectual journey started in the 18th century with an "enlightenment of feelings". We traveled onward to the 1920's and 1930's in Paris, the "fashion capital", and finally arrived in 21st century "English Internet fiction". Characterized by fruitful discussions and useful devices for our on-going research questions, this session was closed on behalf of the professors and the young researchers with sincere farewell remarks by Ansgar Nünning.

Then the doctoral students had the chance to experience the University Campus and Giessen Downtown together with GCSC PhD student NATALYA BEKHTA (Giessen). The sightseeing tour ended with a delicious lunch at the very nice Bar-Celona.

Roundtable on "Criteria & Standards in Literary & Cultural Studies"

In the evening the group met again for a Roundtable on "Criteria & Standards in Literary & Cultural Studies". In our discussion we focused on three highly relevant topics for young scholars' careers – namely supervision, conferences and publications. Stimulating input was supplied by the talks of three GCSC Postdocs: SILKE SCHMIDT (Giessen) discussed current trends for supervising dissertations. Instead of depending on the instruction of one single person, PhD students increasingly take part in the sharing of different opinions in open forums like doctoral schools and programs, a model that is becoming more and more popular. In these programs PhD candidates usually work together with two or more supervisors. ALESYA KRIT (Giessen) indicated clues for how to raise the academic quality of conferences. The researchers' challenge is to fit their themes exactly to the conference-topics. The surplus value of this challenge is to re-think one's own project. Conference papers help to minimize the project to a comprehensible and clarified topic in order to make a concrete argument. VERONIKA ZINK (Giessen) reported practical experiences with publishing in peer-reviewed journals. We gained insight into national differences of reviewing papers and the time consuming process of revising reviewed papers.

Last but not least, Nora Berning provided administrative information regarding the enrollment of doctoral studies at JLU in order to fulfill the conditions of Cotutelle agreements. Besides this, she gave us an outline of the planned events at GCSC and the preliminary study calendar of the PhDnet. All in all the Induction Week was an encouraging kick-off-event for the third cycle of the PhDnet. We are very much looking forward to further opportunities for discussion and the exchange of ideas within the inspiring atmosphere of this five star network!