

African Diaspora Engagement & African Literary Evenings for the Viennese Public

(Knowledge Transfer)

Project leads

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Abstract

This diaspora engagement project organizes seminars and activities that involve African immigrants and second generation Africans who are now Austrians. We give talks about African cultures and we sometimes ask them to talk about their own activities as Africans in Austria. We have reached out to Diaspora Engagement Centres in downtown Vienna, such as AfriPoint, for some of our activities. Another aspect of this knowledge transfer programme, a literary project, involves organizing African poetry competitions and other literary readings for the Viennese public, and this takes place at the Institute of African Studies. We have brought key literary scholars from abroad to take part in these projects.

Many of these activities have been successfully implemented. Between 2015 and now we have organized more than 40 diaspora engagement seminars, bringing international scholars to Vienna and attended by not less than 30 people most of the time and as much as a library and auditorium full of the Viennese public (about a 1000 people!) in the case of the famous African writer, Ngugi wa Thiongo, in May 2017. We have successfully held more than 30 monthly literary readings patronized by more than 100 young poets (including Africans, Austrians, other Europeans/Westerners, and people of Asian backgrounds) who have competed for poetry prizes.

Keywords

Africa; Diaspora; Engagement; Language; Literatures

Aims of the Third Mission activity

The overall aims of our African Diaspora Engagement and African Literary Evening for the Viennese public are (i) to use our cutting-edge interdisciplinary humanities research to promote African culture in Vienna and beyond, especially African writing and other literary creations; (ii) to create an atmosphere where young people in Vienna from different parts of the world can foster bonds and networks of friendship and cross-cultural understanding of Austria/Europe and Africa, which is an important source of natural resources for the current and future economic development of Austria, Europe, and the rest of the world; and (iii) eventually serve as

	a cultural consultancy centre of excellence that advises, lobbies, and makes presentations to government, companies, media and the general public concerning Africa and its diaspora communities in a globalized world.
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Cooperation partners outside the university sector	Various diaspora communities and businesses like AfriPoint, Radio Afrika and the some national associations
Cooperation partners from the scientific/research field	We collaborate with scholars in various universities, some of whom we have invited to Vienna.

Faculty	Forschungsplattform / Philologisch-Kulturwissenschaftliche Fakultät
Timeframe	2015 to now
Funding	GADS until August 2021 (after which new funding will have to be applied for if the project is to continue)

Research basis	This is a project that is derivative of research in African languages and literatures.
Social/economic relevance	This transfer project promotes diversity and cross-cultural understanding. It may be the only transfer project at the University of Vienna involving teaching young Austrians/Europeans about Africa, a continent that is of great cultural, social, economic, and political relevance to Europe.
Integration into academic teaching/the curriculum	We have organized an ECTS course for Africans in Vienna and Chinese in Vienna (in collaboration with the Sinology department).

Impact	First, Diaspora Africans in Austria are getting more and more aware of the University of Vienna commitment to African studies. Since these projects started some of them have told us that they weren't even aware that there was a Department of African Studies. Second, the general Viennese public interested in literature now knows that there is more variety on the literature scene in the city because of the Vienna African Writers (VAW) club, which organizes these activities.
Transfer aspect of the activity	The transfer aspect involves simplifying complex diaspora studies, theories and complex literary/poetry notions and making them accessible to the general public.

Future orientation & sustainability

If we can get more funding we intend to expand on our literary evenings with more competitions and bigger prizes. We also incorporate African music and food tasting elements into the project to give young Austrians and Europeans more African cultural experiences beyond poetry.

Achievement of objectives

We haven't done a formal survey but word of mouth statements and written statements about how the Department of African studies is engaging the diaspora are often heard and seen.

Measures to sustain this activity over the long term/expand it

Publishing literary collections of short stories by writers among Africans in Vienna and asking for more regular diaspora lecture periods with diaspora groupings.

We have planned more diaspora engagement meetings featuring famous scholars, literary giants, and public but all this is subject to funding availability. We also are in the process of editing a collection of folktales for young writers which is sure to guarantee sustainability in that the next generation of writers is being trained. Subject to the availability of funding, we will also continue with our monthly literary evenings and our quarterly newsletter, the Daworo!

Visibility

Webpages; emails; publications; awards; media interviews; public relations; Daworo (Vienna African writers newsletter); GADS programme leaflets

Links/Publications

<http://gads.univie.ac.at/>
