



Fig. 1 (left): A local meeting place at a heritage house in Kampung Peneleh, Surabaya. (Sketch by Hongky Zein, Urban Sketchers Surabaya, 2019)

Fig. 2 (below): Philippe Peycam and Lina Purganti co-moderating a roundtable discussion during the event Decolonizing Area Studies. An Open Conversation in Leiden, October 12, 2023. (Photo courtesy of IIAS, 2023)

Note from the Director

Philippe Peycam

I am writing these lines from Tanzania, after a number of colleagues and myself completed a strategic meeting at the University of Dar es Salaam for the establishment of an interdisciplinary Asia-Africa 'hub' there. This example of gathering for strategic institution-building is one of a series of similar meetings that began in February 2020, when several of our close Asian and African partners met to assist our Thai colleagues from Kasetsart University in Bangkok with the creation of the Kasetsart University Africa-Asia Programme, which in 2022 became Kasetsart University Asia-Africa Centre (KUAAC).

Since then, there have been a few other important steps in that direction, in particular the establishment of the Airlangga Institute of Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC) in May 2023. AIIOC is an autonomous, inter-faculty full-fledged structure emanating from Airlangga University in Surabaya, Indonesia, again with partners from the two regions (Africa and Asia). Before this major institution-building achievement, several equally transformative collaborative efforts were made to establish new inter-regional platforms such as the Collective Africa-Southeast Asia Platform (CASAP), Humanities Across Borders (HAB), and the River Cities Network (RCN). If this was not enough, I was recently invited in Athens, Greece, to brainstorm with local colleagues from Panteion University on the idea of setting up another inter-regional hub, this, within the framework of the European Alliance for Asian Studies of which IIAS operates as the Secretariat.

As far as IIAS is concerned, this collective institution- and network-building effort lays at the intersection of two trends long

pioneered by the institute. The first we now call 'South-South-North,' expressed clearly in the Africa-Asia collaborative axis and, in particular, the Collective Africa-Southeast Asia Platform (CASAP). The second trend relates to a self-reflexive process within IIAS regarding its mission and its role in Leiden University. This internal process benefited from the groundbreaking experience represented by the HAB initiative.

The programme was first established with a goal of transcending the old 'Area Studies' model, considering the state of deep entanglement existing between disciplines and geographies. In its second iteration, the platform-programme, hitherto entitled HAB, embraced a conscious vision of re-thinking the act of knowledge-sharing within the university as well as between the university and society in a global-local framework. Somehow the COVID experience further helped IIAS in identifying some of its multiple roles through the articulation of five better delineated complementary functions: (1) research facilitation, (2) pedagogical innovation, (3) knowledge dissemination, (4) network building, and (5) civic commitment. It is through the prism of these outward collaborative functions that IIAS sees its contribution to the elaboration of Leiden University's international strategy.

This issue goes to print on the eve of the highly innovative initiative

represented by ICAS 13 in Surabaya (July 28 – August 1, 2024). This iteration of ICAS takes the form of an assumed academic-society articulated Conference-Festival, or ConFest, the first ICAS of its kind in the aftermath of COVID. As we approach this event, I can say that IIAS continues its development and transformation, more conscious of its role, impact, and position as a catalysing space and a structured 'clearing house' devoted to local-global knowledge encounters. The institute stands as a necessary link between the university system and the different communities it is destined to serve, in Asia and beyond. IIAS is a space through which the act of craftsmanship of innovative knowledge generation and sharing can reclaim its full agency against an otherwise fragmentary and crudely utilitarian model embedded in a regime of increased commodification of higher education.

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