

What began as a curious research project one and a half years ago, and then had to be postponed at the last minute as Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano erupted, finally culminated in October 2010 in a large-scale international conference: University-Based Institutes for Advanced Study in a Global Perspective: Promises, Challenges, New Frontiers (25th – 27th October 2010) was the world's first meeting of its kind, attracting representatives from 19 countries across the entire globe. For three days, a total of 32 institutes transformed Freiburg's "Haus zur Lieben Hand" into a vibrant forum of exchange and international networking.

The idea behind this event arose out of the observation that, over the past few years, a great number of university-based research colleges have been established – FRIAS among them – not only as part of the German Excellence Initiative, but also in many other places around the world.

The stated goal of the small organizational group led by FRIAS Speaker Werner Frick and Head Administrator Carsten Dose was to unite institutes of this kind in an international context and to inaugurate a discussion forum for exchange regarding the specific tasks and challenges resulting from interaction between institutes and their universities. The wonderful response to the invitations and the positive course of the conference showed that FRIAS was right to undertake this initiative. Throughout three densely packed conference days, participants discussed central issues relating to research funding and held lively discussions both in and outside the sessions about their personal experiences in institute-specific, regional and national contexts. Despite differences in the unique

WELCOMING THE WORLD TO FREIBURG: INTERNATIONAL UBIAS CONFERENCE AT THE FRIAS

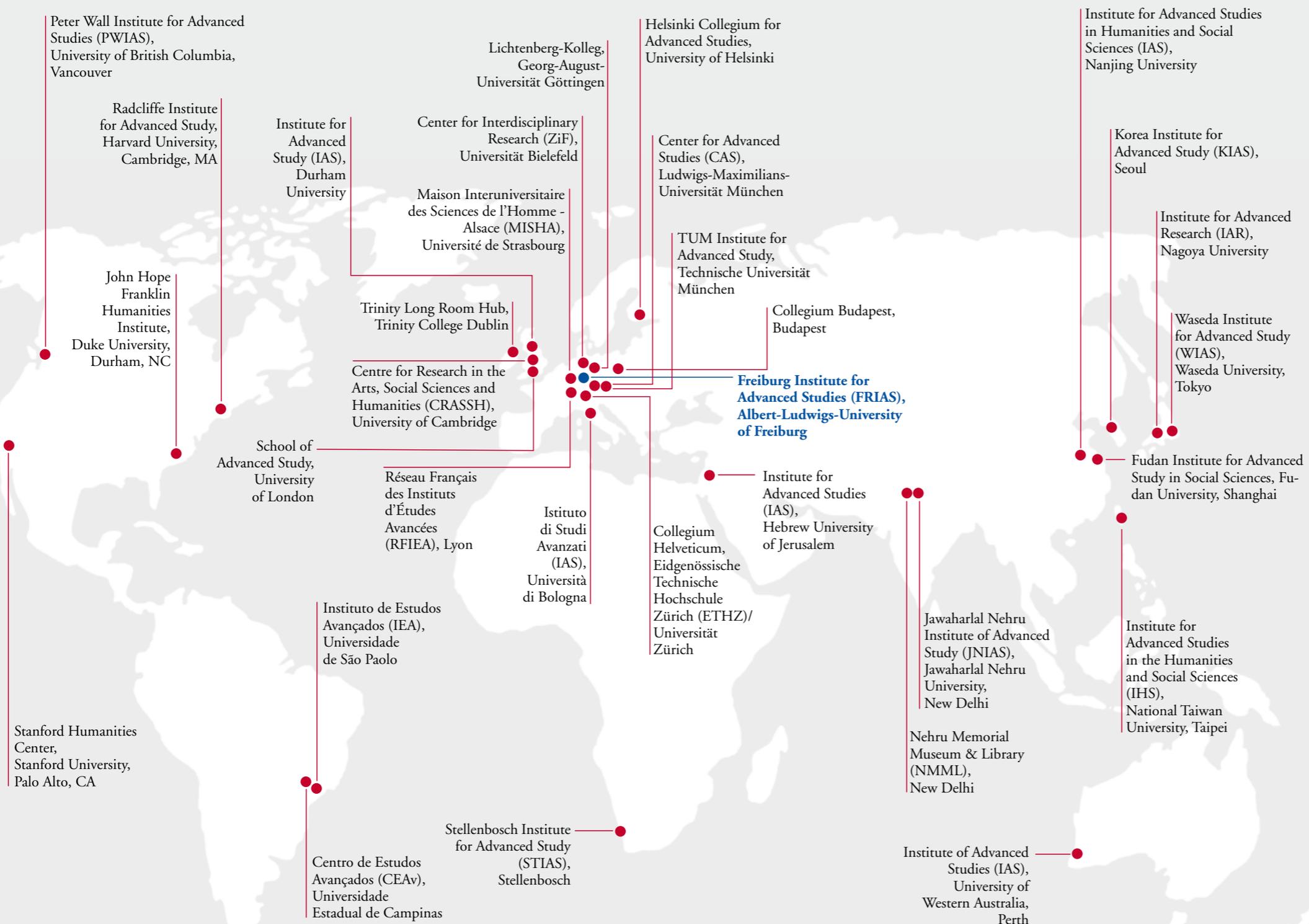


character and weight of individual parameters (such as the number and composition of fellows, setting disciplinary vs. thematic areas of focus, etc.) it quickly became clear through the discussions that a series of central assumptions, features and objectives exists which link the various institutes in this group together and justify talk of a specific institutional type – “university-based IAS”: all the institutes wish to promote top-level university research and, to this end, bring together international scholars who are able to dedicate themselves to either individual research work or group projects in a research-friendly,

intellectually stimulating environment while being released from other duties – such as teaching or committee work – for the duration of their fellowship. At the same time, they remain embedded in a university setting, whose research profile they improve and strengthen.

This core theme was addressed by the keynote speaker, Prof. Philip G. Altbach, an internationally renowned expert in comparative educational and university research from Boston College, whose key-note lecture on the past, present and future of research universities formed a prelude

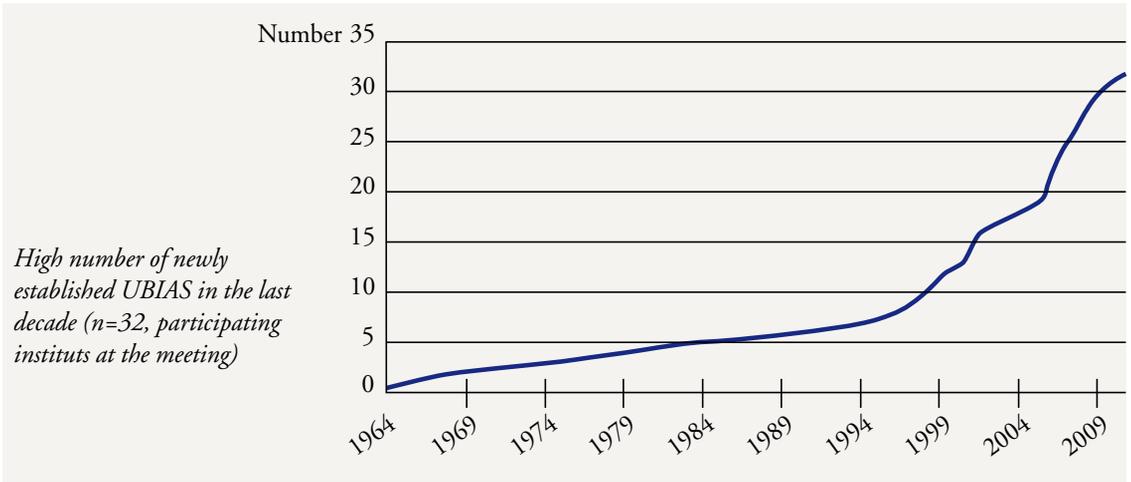
UBIAS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD



to the conference and classified the university-based research college model in a larger context of educational history and higher education policy, even declaring it to be an indispensable component of a modern research university in the 21st century.

At the beginning of the various sessions, the participating institutes used the opportunity to present themselves and their work. Their presentations made plain the impressive scope of the various ways in which the UBIAS concept has been accomplished and conveyed an image of both unity and diversity. The international comparisons were highly informative for all participants – German institutes in particular, who must soon prove themselves in the next competition round of the Excellence Initiative, benefited enormously from this exchange of information. As the conference continued, issues were discussed which highlighted the general theme from different perspectives: which conditions are necessary prerequisites for excellent research; how are research topics and focuses generated; which measures are suitable for making interdisciplinary collaboration both possible and fruitful; which tasks and functions does an IAS have in interacting with its university; what benefits can the university derive from this; and how is the relationship between university and research college structured when caught between the conflicting priorities of research freedom and administrative/financial dependency?

Institutes represented at the UBIAS conference



The successful conference was rounded off by a rich and varied fringe programme (including a dinner and chamber concert in the Black Forest village of Horben, explorations of the medieval and modern ecological faces of Freiburg, a reception with the Rector in the Peterhof Keller, a trip to Colmar and more), which gave the international guests a vivid impression of Freiburg and the surrounding area. These events also afforded participants ample opportunity to exchange information in different (large, small and even bilateral) groups. At the end of the conference, all were agreed that the open network of exchange given so fruitful a beginning in Freiburg should be continued. A steering committee composed of eleven representatives from institutes around the world (including the FRIAS) will thus now formulate initial proposals to create a framework for continued information sharing and collaboration. A second meeting of university-based institutes for advanced study could therefore take place in around two years, perhaps in an Asian member country.

Please note: Detailed documentation relating to the conference is under preparation and will soon be available both on our website at www.frias.uni-freiburg.de/ubias and to order as a brochure. For further information please contact presse@frias.uni-freiburg.de.

