

Challenges and opportunities for IASs – a perspective from Central and Eastern Europe

ANDREW SORS

Introduction

IT IS a pleasure and an honour to contribute to this special issue of *Estudos Avançados* and thereby to play a small part in IEA's well earned celebrations on its 25th birthday.

Collegium Budapest (CB) Institute for Advanced Study is slightly younger than IEA, São Paulo; the former's 25th birthday is due in 2017. While there are now good reasons to hope that CB will attain this auspicious anniversary, it will not do so under its present operation but rather as a University based Institute for Advanced Study. The story of Collegium Budapest, including the somewhat "dramatic" period leading up to its ongoing structural transformation is the leitmotif of this paper.

"Health warning"

In view of CB's ongoing structural transformation, it is appropriate to provide a short clarification concerning my assignment as its Rector.

Following my election my 5 year mandate commenced in November 2008. By the time this article is published in EA, I will no longer be Rector of CB. Having announced my resignation to the CB's governing board in early April 2011, I accepted their request to continue my mandate until 31 August 2011. This agreement is very much in line with my continuing positive sentiments toward the institute and my excellent relations with its governing board.

However, I am convinced that this completely new chapter in the CB's life (which is outlined later on in this article) should be guided by someone new.

Hence the need for a "Health warning": While I believe that the opinions expressed in this article are appropriate and fair, nevertheless they are personal views and do not necessarily represent more formal statements or documents.

Presentation of this paper

The next part of this paper provides an overview of CB including its cre-

ation in 1992 and its operation during the 19 years of its existence. This is followed by a brief outline of the structural transformation of the institute. In the paper's final section, I will provide a few reflections on the "IAS model", with special attention to challenges and opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

A brief history of Collegium Budapest

Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Study (CB) was established in 1989 through an initiative by the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin notably by its Rector, Wolf Lepenies and its Secretary Joachim Nettelbeck and by the President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Iván Berend T.

Following the success of IAS type institutions on both sides of the Atlantic, these founders of Collegium Budapest were convinced that a similar institute within the post-transition Central and Eastern Europe region would significantly enhance academic contacts and cooperation between scholars within the region as well as with the rest of Europe and beyond. But the founders' ambition went beyond this; their aim was also to provide a counterweight to the predominant "intellectual" attitude of the time that the "West knows, while the East should adopt". An IAS institution in the region - as a complement to the habit of inviting scholars from the CEE region to IAS' in the West - would promote empowerment of the academic community in the region.

This major initiative was enthusiastically taken by an international group of senior academics and governments. As a result, in addition to its Hungarian Sponsors, the Collegium received support from Austria, France, the German Federal States of Baden-Württemberg and Berlin, The Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as five private foundations (the Swiss Cultural Foundation Landis & Gyr, the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft, and the Volkswagen Stiftung). These supporters signed a "Joint Declaration" founding act on 17 July 1991. The success of the initiative also owed much to the special welcome offered by the Hungarian government and by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which secured CB a prestigious location in the former City Hall of Buda, and later on, certain tax concessions as a recognized international institution located in Hungary. For the first five years of its operation, Collegium Budapest was an integral part of Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin in terms of organization and of finance.

The decision to host such an important institution in Budapest was based on careful deliberations. Hungary has a long, proud history and tradition of scholarship and of academic excellence; it is no accident that the country can boast of being the birthplace of perhaps the highest per capita incidence of Nobel prize winners.

In 1992, Collegium Budapest celebrated its formal opening in the presence of Richard von Weizsacker, former Federal President of Germany as well as

of Árpád Göncz and József Antall, respectively President and Prime Minister of Hungary. The Latinized name chosen for the institute was intended to signal a shared European heritage dating back to the Middle Ages encompassing both the East and the West of the continent. Collegium Budapest was to be a truly international institution, located in a truly European city.

Since its creation, the Collegium has been housed in a splendid Baroque building in the heart of Budapest's medieval Castle District; designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Preservation site. Constructed during the period 1688 to 1771, the building originally served as the City Hall of Buda and retained this function until 1873, when Buda and Pest became a single city.



Disclosure

Inner Courtyard of Collegium Budapest

In 1999 an elegant, high quality Guesthouse was built to accommodate Visiting Fellows and their families. Named the “Raoul Wallenberg Guesthouse of Collegium Budapest” and opened by a senior member of the Swedish Royal family, the Guesthouse is located directly under the “Fishermen’s Bastion”, close to the institute. Its construction was financed by donations from the Wallenberg Foundations in Sweden and from Kulturstiftung Landis & Gyr, Zug, Switzerland. The Guesthouse has 26 apartments. They are fully equipped and contain a kitchen with a dining place, a living room and one to three sleeping rooms. They are also equipped with a telephone and access to the Internet. Other conveniences include a table tennis room, a sauna, a television room and an indoor parking space.

Academic profile and activities

The governance arrangements of the Collegium Budapest have undergone a number of revisions and adjustments since its creation. These have resulted in some modifications to the institute's basic "constitution" – the CB Association Charter. Nevertheless, the agreed "Purpose" of the CB Association as outlined in the Charter has remained largely the same throughout:

"The purpose of Collegium Budapest Association is to promote science, scholarship and culture within an Institute for Advanced Study by giving internationally recognized academics and young researchers an opportunity to pursue research of their choice in an international, interdisciplinary and intellectually stimulating environment. The Institute is closely modeled on other Institutes for Advanced Study and it endeavours to uphold its institutional character in the spirit of the founders. To achieve its objectives, Collegium Budapest – Institute for Advanced Study cooperates with other domestic and international academic institutions, in particular the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Hungarian universities..."

The Collegium's tradition is based on the Princeton IAS model, whereby researchers free themselves from other engagements for a period and devote their efforts and capacities to their research in a stimulating environment and under optimum working conditions. They discuss their work with other fellows in the form of weekly seminars and take part in other forms of community life (e.g. daily lunches). An important academic feature of CB is that it encompasses the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. This allows the development of interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research and promotes multi-disciplinary communication. Good examples include research on post-socialist transitions, comparative historical and cultural studies in the region, theoretical biology and complex systems research. Themes on current European politics, socio-economic evolution and their relationships with the academic world have been addressed by the Collegium since the beginning.

Collegium Budapest was originally conceived to host a total of 20-25 fellows, with most of them staying for a full academic year. For various reasons, the average duration of fellowships became somewhat shorter while the number of fellows each year increased accordingly. Overall the Collegium hosted 25-30 senior fellows and 6-10 junior fellows during an academic year, for periods ranging from five to ten months. Since its establishment in 1992, more than 700 scholars have worked at the institute. The Collegium also assists fellows coming from outside of Hungary to establish links with the Hungarian scholarly community. While at the Collegium, Fellows deliver lectures and take part in seminars, while pursuing their own research interest. Cultural exchanges are further enriched by the numerous meetings, conferences and public lectures that are organized here.

While the CB is open to fellows pursuing any field of scholarly enquiry, the institute's geographic location and the CEE region's overall historical, cul-

tural and socio economic characteristics have inevitably attracted special interest on the part of scholars working in certain thematic fields.

Indicative distribution of CB fellows according to their primary field of academic interest:

History	130	Linguistics	16
Biology	73	Cultural Studies	16
Philosophy	48	Computer Science	14
Sociology	45	Archaeology	11
Political Science	44	Philology	10
Physics	39	Astronomy	8
Economics	37	Psychology	8
Art History	37	Mathematics	8
Literature	36	Geography	6
Anthropology	30	Cognitive Science	4
Creative Arts	30	Music	4
Law	19	Architecture	2

Two examples below illustrate some of the research fields in which the Collegium has acquired international recognition:

Research on the Post Socialist Transition. The collapse of communism in Europe, the processes of transforming the planned economies into market economies and the transformation of former communist dictatorships into democracies, are among the most remarkable events of the 20th century. The study of the transition process combined with constructive policy recommendations has been one of the central themes of CB's activities. Four focus groups have successively explored various key aspects of the post-Socialist transformation. The cross-fertilisation between the various social science disciplines has turned out to be very stimulating. The 'Collegium Budapest spirit' encourages a multidisciplinary approach, with a parallel understanding of and dialogues across economics and politics, historical retrospect and scientific forward looks.

Comparative Social Sciences. Based upon the opportunities offered by a renewed interactions between the academic cultures in Western Europe and in post-Socialist CEE, and in view of the Collegium's academic mission to pursue a multidisciplinary approach in social sciences, during its first years this field became CB's principal academic focus. Scholarly enquiries have included theoretical, comparative, and historical aspects. Research has focused on methodological renewal in the social sciences (history, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, humanities), as well as the integration of 'local knowledge' and of historical expertise in relation to the understanding of current issues.

In addition to hosting Visiting Fellows pursuing their own research interests, during its lifetime, CB has organized and hosted some 25 thematic Focus

Groups. Typically, these Groups are comprised of 8-12 visiting fellows, staying at the Collegium for periods ranging from 2-4 months, who pursue their specific academic interest within the Focus Group's overall thematic area and who participate in intensive interdisciplinary discussions among the Group participants. One of the most prominent and successful CB Focus Groups was "Honesty and Trust: Theory and Experience in the light of the Post-Socialist Transformation".

An essential feature of the institute has been the academic continuity and guidance provided by the CB's Permanent Fellows. Proposed by the Rector and taking into account the views of CB's independent Academic Advisory Board, Permanent Fellows are elected by the CB's governing board (CB Association) for mandates of 5 years duration which may be received.

CB has also given priority to hosting promising young researchers. While these Junior Visiting Fellows have come from many part of the world, a sizable proportion has been from the countries of the CEE region. The most recent example is the ongoing Fellowship Programme supported by the Volkswagen Foundation. Entitled "Fresh Perspectives on the New European Democracies" (NewDem), the principal aim of this programme is to help promote a new dynamic and interactive research community of young scholars in the social sciences and the humanities across the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and thereby to enhance the knowledge base in this region.

Another important feature of the CB's academic profile has been its encouragement of fellowships in the natural sciences. Having no direct access to laboratory facilities, the focus has been in theoretical domains notably in theoretical biology.

The CB has also been successful in attracting project grants by Hungarian as well as by European funding agencies. While it is outside the scope of this article to discuss in detail, the academic and financial advantages and disadvantages of participation by IAS' type institutes in project driven research has been a "live" issue of debate – and sometimes of disagreement - over a number of years.

Last but not least, the CB has strived to keep in mind the honour of carrying the name of its host city. It has been very much an "open institution" – fellow seminars, invited lectures, occasional cultural events have all been widely publicized and fully open to the public.

An illustrative typology of Collegium Budapest academic activities

Academic function at cb	Type(s) of academic activity	Usual duration of affiliation with cb	Number per year (normal operation)	Type of financial support	Comment
Senior Visiting Fellow	Individual, investigator driven research	6-10 months	25-30	Core funding	The principal academic activity of CB
Junior Visiting Fellow	Individual or dedicated Fellowship programme	5-6 months	25-30	Core funding or through "targeted" philanthropic foundation support	Strong emphasis on fellows from CEE region
Permanent Fellow	Long term individual research Academic "magnet" for visiting fellows Strong involvement in academic guidance of CB	5 years (renewable)	6-10	Core funding	
Thematic Focus Group Fellow	Combination of individual research and Focus Group discussions	3-5 months	6-8 fellows; 1-2 Focus Groups per year	Philanthropic foundations; based on application by Group convener	An excellent vehicle for interdisciplinary discussion
Project funded Researcher	Project based research	Depends on project duration	Variable	Various sources e.g. EU, NKTH, ESA	Research projects in an IAS carry pros' and cons'
Invitees/ Guests etc.	Public lectures, Guest seminars Sometimes as part of a more extensive trip to Budapest/ Hungary	Usually < 1 week	Variable	Accommodation may be offered in CB Guesthouse	
Academic Advisory Board	Provision of independent academic advice to Rector including peer review evaluation of applications	Usually meets once per year at CB	± 15	Travel/subsistence provided by CB core budget	Senior academics, broad range of disciplines as well as of home countries

Towards and assessment of CB as an Institute for Advanced Study

To a degree, it is inherent in the nature of IAS type institutions that the "usual" indicators of scientific quality can only provide a partial and incomplete

measure of achievement and of success in fulfilling their mission. An illustrative example is the question of an Institution's "friendliness" to research which may be considered "high-risk" in terms of outcome; this is frequently penalized by project funding agencies but often encouraged within an IAS setting.

If we consider the most internationally recognized IAS' – among them IAS Princeton, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and some other members of SIAS,¹ the academic prestige of their faculty, permanent fellows and visiting fellows speaks for itself.

As the number and variety of IAS' continues to increase, while researcher excellence remains a key criterion, aspects related to "relevance" also become important. The latter can include choice of thematic foci, promotion of (young) researchers' careers, strengthening researcher mobility, etc. Furthermore, in the case of university based IAS', the legitimate interests of the host university provide a further important consideration.

A number of IAS', including some of the oldest and most prestigious, devote considerable efforts to periodically commission external assessments of their academic performance, their impact on fellows' academic achievements or careers, etc.

The following list provides some "quantitative" indication of CB academic output and activities.

-
- 670 Visiting Fellows from 40 countries of which: 185 Fellows from Hungary, > 40 of Hungarian origin working abroad at the time of their Fellowship application
 - Average length of stay: 6-7 months
 - Average age 48-50
 - Total number of books, chapters, articles published by fellows following or partially through their CB fellowship: 2100-2300 (an average of 3-4 per fellow)
 - 25 Thematic Focus Groups
 - 215 Public Lectures
 - Membership of SIAS and NetIAS networks
 - Participation in selected European and Hungarian research projects
-

There are also numerous *qualitative* indications of CB's position within the academic community:

As early as 1995 Ralph (Lord) Dahrendorf, former Member of the European Commission and former Director of the London School of Economics (LSE) was invited by the sponsors to evaluate the Collegium. He called the CB "*an outstanding success story*" and added "*I find it important to mention that Collegium Budapest is a happy place. I know from my other activities that this is not self-evident and even less so in Central and Eastern Europe.*"

Within the European Union 4th Framework Programme's highly competitive "Centres of Excellence" initiatives, targeted to promoting research in CEE countries prior to their accession to the EU, the Collegium's proposal was ranked second overall by the peer review evaluators – and, indeed, CB was labeled by the Programme as a Centre of Excellence. In 2004, an article appeared in the journal *Nature*, claiming that "*after just a decade in operation it (CB) has established itself as one of the most prestigious academic addresses in Eastern Europe*".

The academic community's recognition of CB was made particularly evident during the first half of 2011, when it became generally known that the institute was at risk of closure, due to insufficient funds.

In an editorial, published in February 2011, it was stated in the journal *Nature*:

"For almost 20 years, the Collegium Budapest has stood as a symbol of a new era of science in central and eastern Europe. Some 700 scholars from 40 countries have spent time in its rarefied intellectual atmosphere – an esteemed institute for advanced study – where, free from teaching and administrative burdens, they have produced hundreds of papers and books in fields ranging from economics to political sciences, theoretical biology and the humanities."

During this period of crisis strong expressions of concern and support for the CB were expressed by the international academic community. A distinguished group of former fellows (including Nobel laureates and other recognized science leaders across the world) stated that the Collegium "*... is a precious scientific resource for Hungary, for Europe and for the world and we are eager to see its continued existence*"

Similar expressions of support came from the highly prestigious SIAS network: "*We firmly believe that the loss of Collegium Budapest would be a major setback for the international research community as well as for the host city, the country and Central/Eastern Europe.*"; as well as from the NetIAS network of 19 IAS' across Europe:

"The Collegium Budapest has played a particularly important role in rebuilding and reshaping academic life in the region after decades of isolation. As the first institute of this type in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, the Collegium has become a model for new forms of academic co-operation and a vivid forum of exchange between East and West."

While such clear and positive sentiments are very welcome and highly encouraging, they should not be a cause for "self satisfaction". Nevertheless, as a whole, they provide assurance that Collegium Budapest is seen by the academic community as a precious and unique international academic asset.

For me personally, the most direct, most welcome and most important views concerning the Collegium's success as an IAS were expressed by the numerous visiting fellows who come to say farewell at the end of their fellowship:

remarks such as “the best and most productive year of my academic career” – and similar appreciations of the institute have been highly typical.

Of course, there is a need for continuous improvement, especially at a time when the higher education and research landscape is changing so rapidly in Hungary, in Europe and across the world. An autonomous IAS of national importance, such as the Collegium Budapest, must be attentive to these developments. At the same time, this acquired “reflexivity” should not compromise the full academic freedom of IAS’ fellows – which remains one of the principal comparative (academic) advantages of IAS type institutions.

Finding and maintaining the right balance between “excellence” and “relevance” has always been a major challenge for institutes such as the Collegium. Here, a number of academic as well as governmental stakeholders, especially in Hungary, took the view that the CB was too much of an “ivory tower”, too distant from the real needs and priorities of its host country. With due attention to the proverb “there is no smoke without fire”, over the past few years the Collegium has significantly strengthened its cooperation with some of the leading universities in Hungary. In early 2011 an institutional cooperation agreement, including some pooling of financial and academic resources was signed with Budapest Corvinus University; discussions were at an advanced stage for similar agreements with the Eotvos University of Budapest as well as with Debrecen University.

Participation of Hungarian scholars in the Independent Academic Advisory Board was recently increased and an informal Rector’s Academic Advisory Council comprised of leading Hungarian scholars was created in order to provide advice on further concrete steps towards a strengthened integration of CB within the Hungarian academic community.

This short outline brings the “academic story” of Collegium Budapest more or less up to date. The next part of the paper provides a brief history and explanation of the Collegium’s longstanding financial crisis which came to a head during the past 12 months or so and which – happily - led to a structural transformation of the Collegium’s operation rather than to its imminent demise.

The ongoing structural transformation of Collegium Budapest

Origins

Readers who have reached this point of the article may be forgiven for being somewhat surprised by the title of this chapter. Why would an internationally recognized and prestigious institute need a “structural transformation”?

At the time of CB’s creation and during the early years of its operation, the institute’s governance and funding arrangements represented a unique and much admired Public-Private Partnership, which included several European governments, several European philanthropic foundations² as well as 2 members from Hungary – the government, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences³. During the early, euphoric years of the post socialist transition across the CEE region,

this partnership was a true “coalition of the willing” (with due apologies to D Rumsfeldt). However, as time went on, the euphoria across the CEE Region and in Europe as a whole began to give way to harsher realities; the Collegium was undoubtedly also affected by the changing political and economic climate.

The simple – but also somewhat simplistic – explanation for the Collegium’s evident existential crisis is that the longstanding funding arrangements were clearly insufficient to allow its continued operation.

In essence, the foreign and the Hungarian sponsors adopted positions which became increasingly incompatible concerning their relative share of the total financial support for the Collegium’s core operation. The foreign sponsors’ understanding was that from the outset there had been a tacit agreement that funding from Hungary – notably through the government and/or Academy of Sciences – would increase over time and would gradually become the principal source of support for the institute. In this way, these sponsors’ own financial stakes would gradually decline from being the predominant contribution towards a very much lower level. In other words, while the foreign sponsors accepted that it was highly appropriate and necessary for them to provide financial and other types of support during the Collegium’s early years, they deemed it appropriate that the financial responsibility for an institute located in and of considerable benefit to Hungary should eventually be primarily assured by that country.

It is somewhat more difficult to summarize the position of the Hungarian government and of the HAS concerning the issue of financial burden sharing. Hungary is confronted with the double challenge of the European and global economic crisis combined with the still unfinished process of post socialist transition. In this light, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that successive Hungarian governments’ positions and attitudes towards the CB have been subject to important variations and uncertainties over time. Nevertheless, the fact remains that over a period of many years, successive Hungarian governments were unwilling or unable to respond positively to the clear need to address the Collegium’s ever more urgent and serious financial challenges.

Thus, the exemplary “coalition of the willing” of CB’s early years gradually became a fragmented group of the “unwilling”. This was not due to a sudden catastrophic event – the problems had been building up over the last 8-10 years, more or less for half of the institute’s 19 year existence.

I firmly believe that if the collective will of the key stakeholders to maintain the Collegium had continued to exist, Association could have come to an arrangement which would have assured the institute’s sustainable future. This would have required a total annual support of 800,000 to 1,000,000 Euros, plus the continuing rent free use of the CB building. This is a relatively modest amount, certainly in comparison with IAS’ of similar standing in Europe and beyond.

Evidently this is not the full story. As mentioned before, there were also important differences of view concerning the CB's academic profile, including advantages and disadvantages of participating in objective driven research projects; the institute's role in Hungarian academe; its contribution to Hungarian higher education as well as to national and European research strategies.

Are there any lessons learnt which may be useful to other IAS? A few reflections follow:

I am not aware of any other fully autonomous IAS in Europe, whose core medium to long term support has been or is being provided by relatively large number of core sponsors, each contributing relatively modest levels of support; in the case of CB support by members of the Association this ranged from 50,000 – 150,000 Euro's p.a., as well as the rent free use of the CB building provided by the Academy of Sciences. In a climate of mutual respect, trust and support – evident during the early years - this partnership was demonstrably a successful arrangement. In particular, the joint participation of key Hungarian as well as key foreign stakeholders in the CB Association was entirely supportive of CB's aspiration to be a highly prestigious, European institution, firmly rooted in Budapest and an important IAS in a European and global perspective. Unfortunately, when the climate of trust and cooperation is (was) no longer there, then the absence of a single principal sponsor – a sort of “IAS godfather” – can quickly turn from an advantage into a serious cause of instability and of eventual fragmentation.

The assurance of financial sustainability for a core IAS programme, at least in a medium term perspective, is an essential pre-requisite for smooth operation as well as for academic credibility of any IAS. While the financial resources required may be relatively modest, obtaining true *institutional* support – including coverage of personnel and operational costs – is very difficult under current economic conditions. This is certainly the case in Europe, where the culture of private endowment for such institutions is weak in comparison with the USA.

Once the core funding is assured, finding support for specific fellowship programmes, “named” fellowships, interdisciplinary focus groups, etc. becomes much more realistic – however, the overhead/administrative costs provided for these targeted schemes are generally low and, of themselves, insufficient to cover overheads in full.

Finally, quite apart from the specific difficulties within the CB Association, the institute's experience indicates that a governance structure in which the institutional funders are one and the same as the members of governing board can become a source of problems. Under such an arrangement, each institutional member must act *simultaneously* in the interest of his/her organization as well as in the collective interest of the IAS concerned. These two do not always fully coincide and can then give rise to unavoidable institutional conflicts of interest.

From Collegium Budapest IAS to Collegium Budapest – CEU IAS

It may be appropriate to begin this section with a localized adaptation of an Irish joke: A driver stops his car in Debrecen and asks a passing pedestrian the way to Budapest – to which the pedestrian replies (in Hungarian of course). “Sir, if you wish to go to Budapest I don’t recommend that you start from here”...

For all the difficulties and disagreements, at the 12th hour, the key stakeholders of the Collegium faced up to the “reality” of CB’s situation and that they had no choice but to start from where they were.

In September 2010, the CB Association created a “strategic sub-group” of key stakeholders to discuss and recommend options for CB’s future. Based upon these intensive and detailed discussions which culminated with two meetings of the CB Association, in April and June 2011 respectively, a plan was approved by the Association which provides a sustainable foundation for the future operation of the institute and will enable it to continue to invite 10-20 excellent research fellows for periods of up to one year.

Under the plan, Central European University (CEU) will provide the necessary administrative support to guarantee the future operation of the institute under the name Collegium Budapest – CEU Institute for Advanced Study (CB-CEUIAS). This includes continuation of the Visiting Fellowship programmes for the Academic Year 2011/12 which had been already approved by Collegium Budapest’s international Academic Advisory Board.

CEU is among the leading graduate level, research-intensive universities in Hungary and in Europe. It has a double legal and academic identity being, at the same time, a Hungarian and US-chartered and accredited university. CEU has strong ties with the Hungarian as well as with the international academic community and proven excellence especially in social sciences and the humanities. The University’s students come from over 100 countries around the world and its faculty from over 40 countries. Being hosted by CEU will offer Collegium Budapest a unique academic platform for strengthening cooperation with other Hungarian universities, as well as with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Furthermore, the Collegium will become the first IAS from the CEE region to join the rapidly growing global community of University-Based Institutes for Advanced Study (UBIAS).

At the time of writing this paper, CEU was in the process of appointing the Collegium’s Academic Director, while the continued excellence and rigorous selection of fellows will be ensured by an independent, high-level Academic Advisory Board. The Collegium’s principal location will be its Raoul Wallenberg Guesthouse, while seminar and other facilities will be made available at the CEU main campus in downtown Budapest.

“Back to the future” – reflections on IAS’ from CEE perspective

Any attempt to comment on the possible future role and evolution of Institutes for Advanced Study requires a strong dose of caution and humility. Nevertheless, certain trends are discernible and may deserve some further reflection.

There appears to be a rapid increase in the number of institutes labeled as Institute(s) for Advanced Study (or something very similar). While the FRIAS⁴ survey prepared for the first UBIAS conference in Freiburg (Oct. 2010) does not claim to be exhaustive, it records a steep increase in the creation of university based IAS’ (5 new institutes created in 1984, 10 in 1999, to over 30 in 2009). This growth is not confined to the industrialized world – the FRIAS report clearly confirms that it is a worldwide phenomenon. At the same time, there appears to be less evidence for any increase in the number of independent, autonomous IAS’ – this seems hardly surprising in view of current funding constraints.

These developments are unlikely to be “accidental”. They appear to coincide with ongoing major changes in the higher education and research landscapes across many parts of the world. (e.g. as demonstrated by the Excellence Initiative in Germany and similar initiatives in a number of other European countries.) Overall, this recent rapid increase in IAS numbers makes it more difficult to be clear about the principal common denominators across such institutes. Nevertheless, while there is a broad distribution of academic size, thematic focus and funding, certain common objectives and features are evident.

At the present time, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe do not seem to be following this general trend in relation to IAS creation. The three “recognized” IAS in the region – NEC, Bucharest; CAS Sofia and Collegium Budapest – are all autonomous institutions and have been in operation for some time now.

In many respects this is not a surprise. The dramatic events of 1989 across the CEE region, the major adjustments faced by these countries in becoming members of the EU, the acute shortage of financial resources, residual rigidities in the higher education and research systems, inevitably lead to other, seemingly more urgent priorities.

At the same time, in my view, IAS’ type institutions in CEE countries could help to respond to a number of ongoing challenges and opportunities in relation to the development of their knowledge based economies. A few of the challenges which IAS’ in the region may be particularly well suited to address are:

National Excellence Programmes

A number of CEE countries are engaged in significant reforms of their HE/research systems. One feature of this is the general tendency to provide privileged support to the leading universities etc. in order to help increase their

international competitiveness, ranking. Several universities involved in such initiatives in a number of countries have established Institutes for Advanced Study, as an integral part of their strategy. A number of CEE countries, notably Hungary, are also engaged in “excellence type” initiatives with similar objectives. Within this overall context, the case for creating IAS type institutions deserves careful considerations.

Brain drain/circulation; mobility of researchers

The growing internationalization of science, as well as the promotion of free movement of researchers within the European Research Area (ERA) are a “mixed blessing” for CEE countries. IAS type institutions can help promote inward mobility; the reintegration of the best scholars; and in increasing the attractiveness of the host country/city/university for research.

Promotion of inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation

While considerable “lip service” is given to the advantages of interdisciplinary research cooperation, in practice this is neither easy nor always appropriate. At the same time, the promotion of meaningful cooperation and interchange across disciplines is a major challenge and is a potential source of comparative advantage in research, as well as in innovation. The example of CB – and other leading IAS – demonstrate that these types of institutes can provide highly appropriate academic environments to advance the creation of new knowledge by inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge, in a flexible and dynamic way. Furthermore, within the setting of individual universities, IAS’ can help offset the “default” tendency for monodisciplinary work; this is a particularly important challenge for CEE countries.

Social Sciences and Humanities

The dominant trend in research continues to be towards “big science”, research to address the so-called “grand societal challenges”, large, objective driven collaborative research projects and increasingly large scale research infrastructures: like it or not, the social sciences and humanities (SSH) cannot afford to be absent from these endeavour.

While SSH are continually challenged by this demand for strengthened integration – this can be sometimes at the expense of advances within their own disciplines as well as to the detriment of multidisciplinary cooperation within SSH. In this general science policy, IAS type institutions provide particularly appropriate settings for scholars in SSH to pursue excellent, investigator driven research in their fields of interest.

Additionally, in the former countries of the Soviet block, social sciences and the humanities are still not entirely free of the huge academic “shackles” of that period. IAS’ could contribute, relatively quickly and effectively, to further reinvigorate these fields of enquiry.

IAS' participation in the European Research Area (ERA)

With the accession of CEE countries to the EU, more traditional forms of bilateral research cooperation across Europe have declined significantly, to be replaced by intra-European collaboration, notably through the EU Framework Programmes. While CEE countries have made significant progress in their application and success rates in FP's, overall, they still face important obstacles to living up to their full potential.⁵ This has proven to be particularly serious for “researcher excellence” related activities such as the ERC and the Marie Curie (People) Schemes; and also by the fact that FP does not support institutional costs.

The growing number of IAS across Europe and their evident wish to collaborate at the European level (e.g. NetIAS, EURIAS, etc) offer highly promising opportunities within future EU programmes. As the recent NetIAS contribution to the Commission Green Paper (“Towards a common strategic Framework for Research and Innovation Funding”) underlines, at present there is no EU funding niche for “excellent research institutions” as a complement to the support of excellent researchers (ERC); of researchers careers and mobility (Marie Curie scheme) as well as in relation to objective driven collaborative research projects (Collaboration Programme). NetIAS and other academic IAS networks in Europe could usefully strengthen their collective voice in helping to shape future European science policies.

Concluding remarks

There is a resurgence of interest in academic profiles and activities in which IAS' offer tried and tested models. A new look at what these type of institutes can contribute is highly timely. Instituto de Estudos Avançados of the University of Sao Paulo is to be congratulated on initiating, compiling and publishing this 25th Anniversary celebratory issue.

Notes

- 1 SIAS – Some Institutes for Advanced Study – Members are: IAS Princeton; Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University; National Humanities Center, North Carolina; Radcliffe College, Harvard; Collegium Budapest IAS, Hungary (till June 2011); Netherlands IAS, Wassenaar; Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences, Uppsala; Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Germany; IAS at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel.
- 2 Supporting government and private foundations were from Austria, France, Germany (including some German Länder), Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland.
- 3 In 2008, the Central European University joined the CB Association and became its third member from Hungary.
- 4 FRIAS – Freiburg Institute for Advanced Study.
- 5 A recent Common Position Paper by EU-12 (new) member states concerning the next EU Framework Programme states that – these Member States' situation in EU level Research “does not fully reflect (their) capabilities and potential”.

Andrew Sors is dean of Institute for Advanced Study of Collegium Budapest, Szentháromság utca 2, 1014 Budapeste (until August 31, 2011). @ – andrewsors@gmail.com

Received on 28 Aug. 2011 and accepted on 30 Aug. 2011.