

Preface to special issue: stability, democracy and rights

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The acronym of MAGAART contains the initials of all the universities – Maseno (Kenya), Aarhus (Denmark) Gulu (Uganda), Aalborg (Denmark), Roskilde (Denmark) and Tribhuvan (Nepal) – that in 2014 joined hands in an innovative and interesting experiment: Using E-learning to strengthen PhD-training across the three continents of Africa, Asia and Europe. This project was an offspring from an earlier collaboration initiated in 2011 under the name “Building Stronger Universities” (BSU), where a Danish-led and Danida-funded initiative to strengthen research capacity in selected universities in four African countries and Nepal had been organised in thematic platforms. The platform for Humanities and Social Science research focused on stability, democracy and rights, the themes that have also organised this volume.

During the BSU phase 1 project, a number of talented researchers had been identified at each south partner university and awarded a full PhD grant. The grants enabled for study stays in Denmark and collaborative south-north supervision, adopting a so-called sandwich model. Building on such existing collaboration, the MAGAART project developed a series of training activities that targeted this cohort of BSU PhD students but also allowed for other participants. PhD courses covered topics such as methods and data analysis, academic writing, conflict management, academic publication, use of qualitative software for analysis, and study tours to Denmark for PhD students, for their supervisors and for senior university managers.

E-learning was used in the PhD courses in two distinct ways. Firstly, it was used to extend face-to-face workshops temporally, i.e. to stimulate learning and interaction pre and post workshops. In such workshops, the target group of each individual course would be limited to PhD students who could be physically present in the main workshop event, whereas facilitators could come from any university in the project. Secondly, E-learning was used to extend participation across space. A series of three workshops on methods and analysis was conducted with one south partner university hosting the face-to-face workshop and PhD students from the two other south partner universities participating online. Each south university hosted one of the three workshops in this course. The ability to interact and engage across countries and continents widened the perspective and academic outlook of participants and facilitations alike, and stimulated academic growth. Video conferencing facilitated meetings and consultations on administration and implementation of the planned activities.

On three occasions: the Maseno Conference March 2012, the Gulu Conference April 2012 during BSU I, and the MAGAART conference in Nepal December 2016, it was possible to bring PhD students and many of their supervisors together to share and discuss their research in different fields but always enriching and broadening the common understanding of societal challenges under the themes of stability, democracy and rights. In addition to the important and interesting findings from the individual studies, the conferences also provided a space for comparative perspectives. While each country has its own specific issues to address in relation to the three broad themes, reflecting their distinctive histories and sociocultural dynamics, there are important crosscutting issues. Having had the privilege to act as project director for the MAGAART project, and before that for the BSU Platform on Stability, Democracy and Rights, it is a great pleasure to see some of the analyses shared at the conferences being developed in detail in this volume. I wish to thank the editors for their dedication in bringing the activities of MAGAART into fruition in the form of this great collection of essays.

The special issue is the outcome of presentations given in a conference held by Tribhuvan University in Nepal from 6-7 December 2016. It should be noted that the *Globe* journal normally

publishes issues focusing on language, linguistics and communication studies. However, for this special occasion the Journal Editorial Board has accepted a slight deviation from the disciplines profiled by *Globe*, given Aalborg University's membership of the MAGAART consortium.

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