Latest activities

This year the Institute of Federalism celebrated the 25th edition of the Summer University. For the 25th time, students from all over the world gathered in Fribourg for the 3-week course which is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Between 19 August and 06 September, 30 students from more than 20 different countries were introduced to federalism, decentralisation and conflict resolution and dealt with case studies on India, China, Russia, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

In order to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Summer University, an international conference "States Falling Apart? Secessionist and Autonomy Movements in Europe" was held at the end of the first week of the course. More than 80 participants attended the conference which took place on 22 and 23 August. Speakers at the event included renowned specialists in federalism: Ronald Watts, Michael Burgess and John Kincaid as well as justice Helen Keller from the European Court of Human Rights. A number of academics, representatives from federal and cantonal governments, students from the Summer University as well as other interested parties, participated in the conference which examined the cases of Catalonia, Belgium, Greenland, the Basque Country, South Tyrol, Cyprus and Scotland, as well as more general issues connected to cultural and economic autonomy and the legal consequences of secessionist movements.

Impressions from the Summer University and from the international conference are available on our Facebook page.

Subsequent to the Summer University, between 09 September and 18 October took place the Internship Programme for Professionals in Federalism. 4 participants from Argentina, Nepal, Cameroon and Bosnia Herzegovina had had the possibility to gain insight into the activities of Swiss cantonal authorities of the cantons of Bern, Zürich, St. Gallen and Vaud. Furthermore they had worked on their own state comparing projects and the results had been presented in the respective cantonal departments. The programme, which was organised by the Conference of the Cantonal Governments and the Institute of Federalism, received a very positive response from the participants as well as from their supervisors from the cantons. It was a win-win situation for both sides and the fruitful discussions led to new insights.

Capacity building and advanced training

Swiss-Chinese workshop
The Dignity of Fluorescent Fish and Political Participation in City Planning Procedures: these and other topics were lively discussed by the participant of the latest Sino-Swiss Workshop. The workshop on “Public Interest in Administrative Law"
was held on 5 and 6 November 2013 in Fribourg. The event which was organized in the context of the long-standing cooperation between the China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, and the Institute of Federalism brought together a delegation of eight professors of the Faculty of Law of the first-mentioned University, invited speakers of the Confederation, cantonal administrations and of the private sector, as well as members of the Institute of Federalism.

After a general introduction to the principle of public interest in the respective legal orders, the participants dealt with the public interest in more specific areas such as economic law, banking and financial services law, health law and environmental law. It became soon clear that despite the obviously large differences between China and Switzerland both countries face similar problems with regard to the protection of the public interests, starting with the definition of this fundamental legal principle which governs all the state activities. Respecting it is a highly challenging task of crucial importance for the authorities, whether when trying to find an appropriate solution in order to prevent the collapse of one of the most important Swiss banks or when organizing the Chinese system of public hospitals.

The next meeting is scheduled to take place in June 2014 in Beijing. For more information concerning the Sino-Swiss collaboration please contact Nina Massüger, research fellow at the Institute of Federalism.

Guest Researchers
The Institute of Federalism welcomes guest scholars to carry out research in the fields of federalism, state organisation, democracy and good governance, human rights and minority protection, multiculturalism and conflict resolution. The institute supports and facilitates research stays for scholars with external (or own) funding throughout the year. Through our Guest Researcher Programme we also offer a number of scholarships to scholars who are interested in conducting research at the Institute. Limited places are still available for the last trimester of 2014. Detailed application information is available here. This fall, 3 new researchers have joined our team at the Institute of Federalism.

Mais Qandeel from Ramallah received her bachelor's degree in law from the Palestinian university Al-Quds University in 2006 and her Master degree L.L.M from the University of Pittsburgh, USA in 2012. She worked for a year as a trainee lawyer at the Arab Bank, was a legal advisor for the Palestine Red Crescent Society and also worked as a partner at the Ahmad Qandeel Law Office for four years. In 2012-2013 she worked at the Palestine Red Crescent Society as the International Humanitarian Law Head of Unit and taught International Law at Al-Quds University. Mais is currently a PhD candidate and the topic of her dissertation is "The Effectiveness of the Judicial System in Enforcing Human Rights in Palestine". She has joined the Institute with a Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship to work on her thesis. The results of her research will be presented back home and will bring resolutions to courts to effectively enforce human rights in Palestine. mais.qandeel@unifr.ch

Asnake Kefale from Ethiopia is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the Addis Ababa University. He received his PhD from the University of Leiden in 2009. Kefale’s research interests include: policies and institutions of conflict management in Ethiopia and Horn of Africa region, federalism, civil society, resource conflicts, and political and economic development. His most recent publication is: Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia: A Comparative Regional Study. London: Routledge (2013). He as well joined the Institute in September 2013 as a post-doctoral researcher with a Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship. His research project will be a comparative study of federalism and decentralisation in the management of conflicts in the Horn of Africa. The results of the research will provide inputs to policy makers and contribute to the growing literature on the problem of managing conflicts in the region. asnakekefale.adegehe@unifr.ch

Zongjin Tong from China joined the Guest Researcher Programme in October. He is Associate Professor at China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing. The topic of his research is “The Basic Law and Democratic Reforms in Hong Kong: the Unsettled “One Country Two Systems” between Sovereignty and Autonomy.” This is one of the key problems in Hong Kong and even in China, which will also enhance the general knowledge of the relation between the central and local government. He will use the findings of his stay in his teachings and eventually in a publication. tongzj@gmail.com
Changing Federal Constitutions
Edited by Arthur Benz and Felix Knüpling

Globalisation and regionalisation: these two simultaneous processes, which have taken place in the past three decades in most parts of the world, have made necessary constitutional reforms in several countries. In some cases the reforms were successful; in other cases the discussions are still on-going. The book edited by Benz and Küpling analyses constitutional changes in federal and decentralising countries from a comparative perspective. The volume covers the cases of six countries considered federal (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Spain and Switzerland) and three countries that are in process of federalisation (Italy), devolution (United Kingdom) or decentralisation (France). The authors identify structures, processes and strategies which have proven to favour successful constitutional amendment. Thereby, the book enables public officials, scholars, and students to learn from the constitutional reform experiences of other federal democracies and from practical suggestions how future reforms could be designed.

Arthur Benz is Professor for Political Science at the Technische Universität Darmstadt.
Felix Knüpling is Head of Programs and Partnership at the Forum of Federations.


China’s Vanishing Worlds
by Matthias Messmer and Hsin-Mei Chuang

Just a few kilometres from the glittering skylines of Shanghai and Beijing, we encounter a vast countryside, an often forgotten and seemingly limitless landscape stretching far beyond the outskirts of the cities. Following traces of old trade routes, once-flourishing marketplaces, abandoned country estates, decrepit model villages, and the sites of mystic rituals, the authors of this book spent seven years exploring, photographing, and observing the vast interior of China, where the majority of Chinese people live in ways virtually unchanged for centuries.

China’s Vanishing Worlds is an impressive documentation in images and text of modernisation’s effect on traditional ways of life, and a sympathetic portrait of lives burdened by hardship but blessed by simplicity and tranquillity. The scars of China’s recent history and the decay of centuries-old traditions are made visible in this volume, but so is the lure and promise of technology and another life for young people. In the next twenty years, an estimated 280 million Chinese villagers will become city dwellers, leaving their ancestral homes in search of urban jobs and opportunities.

China’s Vanishing Worlds offers readers a rare opportunity to glimpse China as it once was, and as it will soon no longer be.

Matthias Messmer is the author of Jewish Wayfarers in Modern China. His work focuses on Chinese cultural politics, pop culture, and Western images of China.
Hsin-Mei Chuang is a researcher, cultural manager, and writer.

MESSMER, MATTHIAS/ CHUANG, HSIN-MEI, China’s Vanishing Worlds. Countryside, Traditions and Cultural Spaces, Cambridge/Massachusetts: 2013

Edited by Konferenz der Kantonsregierungen (KdK)

The fourth publication from the PIFF (Publications of the Institute of Federalism) series is dedicated to the work of the Conference of Cantonal Governments, who celebrates this year 20 years of activity. The volume addresses the current challenges of the Swiss cantons and the Swiss federal system. The authors of this trilingual publications are actors from the political, economic and Swiss public life, among them Ueli Maurer, president of the Swiss Confederation, Sandra Meissen, secretary general of KdK, Roger de Weck, director of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation and Bernhard Waldmann, vice-director of the Institute of Federalism.

Upcoming events

10 December 2013, 16:30-18:15
Public lecture with Prof Sergio Ferrari (Local Government in Brazil and Switzerland: a comparative study on merger and inter-municipal cooperation) and Dr Tong Zongjin (The Basic Law and Democratic Reforms in Hong Kong: the Unsettled “One Country Two Systems” between Sovereignty and Autonomy)
Institute of Federalism, Rte d’Englisberg 7, 2nd floor 1763 Granges-Paccot

18 August – 05 September 2014
26th International Summer University on Federalism, Decentralisation and Conflict Resolution. Application window open between 01 February and 31 March 2013.

Contributions

If you wish to include your news, share an event, promote a publication or advertise a job with our network feel free to contact us at ircc-newsletter@unifr.ch. Our Newsletter is published quarterly; the deadline for submission of news for the next issue is 1st February 2014. Any comments, feedback or ideas are welcome. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.
If you would like to subscribe/unsubscribe from our newsletter, send an email with subscribe/unsubscribe to ircc-newsletter@unifr.ch.

Feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone you think might be interested.

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