

**Observations concerning the evaluation of the Center for Global Studies (CEG) at ABERTA University,
undertaken by the evaluation panel of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology**

Luiz Oosterbeek, in my condition of member of the External Advisory Commission of the Center for Global Studies at ABERTA University, I received a copy of the application submitted to the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, in the framework of the call to establish or renew research units in Portugal. I also received the report of the evaluation panel and the subsequent appeal for a revision, submitted by CEG.

I am aware of the research undertaken by CEGs PI, Professor José Eduardo Franco, for a large number of years. I am also aware of the progress in establishing a research Center in Global Studies, which is a major concern of the academic community and a world level, which has been subject to growing reflections and initiatives, particularly in the last decade. The impact of standardization in the mechanisms of academic production from the 1990's had a severe impact in the domains of Human and Social Sciences, not only in their societal impact (as, in many cases, the model of papers production is not the most adequate to their assessment) but also on their production (namely because younger generations had to adapt to a model of assessment that undervalued the preparation of books, for instance). These, in turn, had two important consequences: the overall role of the Humanities in binding together academic knowledge and its conditions of validation was weakened, leading to a fragmentation of disparate specializations) and the investment in short term problems was growingly isolated from the need to frame them within wider dilemmas that impend on societies today. The awareness of this fragmentation of knowledge triggered the initiatives to promote STEM and STEAM approaches, but these were still unable to bridge the major divides created. Global Studies are the international approach that is emerging in different universities (having started in US Universities, as a combination of minor BA itineraries and PhD programs).

The Center for Global Studies addresses this gap. It is a recent Centre, but it already has an impressive list of impactful publications, including several "Global Studies" series of volumes. It must be stressed, though, that the efforts of CEG are not only theoretical. In line with the Humanities intellectual traditions, CEG has integrated the theoretical research with applied site-based projects (partnerships with local authorities, etc., which meet the UNESCO recommendations and the conclusions of the European Humanities Conference, organized by UNESCO, CIPSH and FCT in Lisbon, during the Portuguese presidency of the European Council) and a strong investment in advanced education (over 50 PhD students is not a small number, namely for a young Center). CEG also understands well what "Global Studies" are about: humanities led, but essentially interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. I particularly appreciated the fact that research, applied research and advanced education engaging different disciplines, are conceived as a one integrated program, not a collection of separate avenues. I also saw the strong engagement of CEG in developing an international research agenda, illustrated by a strong networking that includes the recognition by international academic evaluation panels in the CIPSH Chairs and UNESCO Chairs programs. This important international networking was not done, however, dissolving a very strong focus on producing research results in Portuguese, which itself meets recommendations from the World Humanities Conference (Liège, 2017) and the European Humanities Conference (Lisbon, 2021). This is ground for its impact in lusophone countries but goes beyond



this: in Humanities, publishing in different languages is fundamental, as there are conceptual dimensions in languages that are hardly translatable.

Reading the FCT panel observations, I am convinced it did not grasp the richness of CEG, possibly because of lack of time (several mistakes and missing words suggest an hasty redaction) and difficulty on following the very strong production so far (as the report itself states, on several occasions, suggesting that the evaluators were not experts in at least some of the topics of research, as the report refers to “heterogeneity”). It is striking that the panel acknowledges the “good start” of CEG but questions the diversity of its themes (which is, itself, the very nature of Global Studies). I believe the evaluators, opposing advanced research education to “conventional academic social science, natural/exact science or humanities” divert from how advanced research in the Humanities is often conducted and build on an unclear notion of “convention”. It is understandable that “direct comparison” is not easy to make, because other centers are not focused on Global Studies, but this should not result in lowering the score of CEG, as any innovative research avenue will face difficulties in terms of direct comparison.

Concerning the team, it seems that the panel overlooked the major advantage of having, in the same Center and with a shared vision, approaches from history, economy and management, literature, religious studies, law, theology, philosophy and humanities at large. It is precisely this wide range that allows to foster global studies. At an international scale, this was the discussion undertaken in the International Council for Philosophy and Humna Sciences, when it decided to start a long-term project on the Global History of Humankind. Certainly anchored in history (and thus building from the International Council for Historical Sciences), this project engages all domains of the humanities (anthropology, literature, history of religions, aesthetics, philosophy,...) and beyond (environmental studies, etc.), as historical research is, today, understood as needing to integrate all those dimensions (including non-academic inputs within transdisciplinary frameworks of research). I saw the report recognizes the quality of the researchers, but strangely considers negatively the “challenge of managing and mastering a collective work in a such a diverse framework.” It is indeed a challenge, but one that CEG already demonstrated it can master, in its brief history. What the panel seems to have perceived as a weakness is, in my view, certainly building from a risk that was transformed into a strength and an important contribution for research in Portugal.

Concerning the organization of CEG for the next five years, the report makes some relevant recommendations (namely in terms of management) but recommends concentrating efforts in Global Historical Studies, but this would contradict the purpose of the center itself. The subsequent consideration that the educational components of the project should go to a Center of Education is particularly strange, as it seems to misunderstand the relevance of advanced education in research, which is one of CEGs stronger dimensions (which, itself, explains the impact in terms of young researchers, something that is a priority for national and European research). In any case, despite some contradictory statements, the report acknowledges that “The research groups are explained and planned activity themes clearly identified. These appear complementary and should provide suitable vehicles for the Centre in developing momentum, focus and reputation.”

When criticizing the fact that CEG doesn’t include fund raising in the other Portuguese speaking countries, possibly it ignores that, besides African countries having no such funding resources, Brazil never “exports”



funding (even in a shared mechanism like CYTED, in which Brazil is the second largest funder, it only funds activities in Brazil or of Brazilians outside, but would never transfer funds to CEG, as this is not possible according to its rules). The evaluators also make some important recommendations that could be welcome by CEG, namely concerning the management model, but these, in any case, should not preclude awarding a very good score for the Center.

Concluding, despite several negative observations that are not sufficiently substantiated and result, possibly, from a lack of time to read all CEG's contributions, the evaluators report recognizes the quality of the researchers, the very strong level of publications and outputs, the strong internationalization, the ambitious project for the next five years and the need to make some improvements on the basis of a "good start". The report also recognizes that the Center will raise two thirds of its budget beyond FCT, which is quite relevant, and that FCT's funding is a potential lever to raise further support. The proposed "weak" score doesn't seem adequate to the evaluation, even considering all the criticisms, and would render impossible for CEG to even follow any of the panel's recommendations. For these to be considered, the center must have a recognition of its capacity to operate, and I think that, in coherence to the above overall positive impressions of the evaluators, and in line with the announced criteria in the call, I think it makes sense revisiting the scores and awarding a "Very Good" final approval.

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Professor Luiz Oosterbeek