

Science to policy through art

Q & A with IIASA Science and Art Associate Gloria Benedikt

Q When and how did you start to connect dance to broader societal questions?

A The tipping point was when I was working in the library as an undergraduate student at Harvard University. I had to go to the theater for a performance, and thought to myself: I wish I could stay here, because there is more creativity involved in writing a paper than in going on stage executing the choreography of an abstract ballet. I realized that I had to get out of ballet company life and try to create work that establishes the missing link between ballet and the real world.

To follow my academic interest, I could write papers, but I had another language that I could use—dance—and I knew that there is a lot of power in this language. So I started choreographing papers that I wrote and rather than publishing them in journals, I performed them. The first work was called *Growth*, a duet illustrating how our actions on one side of the world impact the other side. As dancers we need to concentrate and listen to each other, take intelligent risks and not let go. If one of us lets go, we would both fall on our faces.

Q What motivated you to make this career change?

A It's time to bring art back into society, where it can create an impact. I am not a scientist. I don't know exactly how the data is produced, but I can see the results, make sense of them and connect them to the things that I am specialized in.

Q How did you get involved with IIASA?

A I first started interdisciplinary thinking with the economist Tomáš Sedláček, who I met at the European Culture Forum 2013. A year later I had a public debate with Tomáš and the composer Merlijn Twaalfhoven in Vienna. Pavel Kabat, IIASA Director General and CEO, attended this and invited me to come to IIASA.

Q What have you done here so far?

A For the first year at IIASA I created a variety of works to reach out to scientists and policymakers. This year I tried to integrate the two groups by actively involving scientists in the creation process. The result, *COURAGE*, an interdisciplinary performance debate premiered at the European Forum Alpbach 2016. In September, I codirected a new project called *Citizen Artist Incubator* at IIASA.

Q Are you planning on doing research of your own?

A At the moment I am trying something, evaluating the results, and seeing what can be improved, so in a way that is a type of research. Some preliminary results came from the creation of *COURAGE*. We found that if we as scientists and artists want to work together, both parties have to compromise. That is exactly what we expect humanity to do when tackling global challenges. We have to be team players. It's like putting a performance on stage. Everyone has to work together. **AB**



Gloria Benedikt

was born to dance.

But with a degree in government studies and an interest in current affairs, Benedikt now builds bridges between art and science.

Read more at blog.iiasa.ac.at/benedikt-16

Gloria Benedikt benedikt@iiasa.ac.at