Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

A New Philosophical/Intellectual Force is Emerging in Los Angeles

Allon Schoener · Friday, November 10th, 2017

Until recently, the Berggruen Institute was a hardly known nor visible entity in Los Angeles. However, it manifests the potential to become a major cultural and intellectual force on the global horizon. Its website states: "The Nicolas Berggruen Institute is dedicated to exploring new ideas of good governance. The NBI is an independent, non-partisan think tank which – with the commitment and dedication of elder statesmen and women, global thinkers, leading entrepreneurs who volunteer their time and advice – engages in the design and implementation of systems of governance suited to the new and complex challenges of the 21st century." There is nothing modest said here. Clearly, the Berggruen Institute promotes ambitious and lofty aims.

Although new to Los Angeles, the Berggruen Institute has been functional since its founding in 2010 by Nicolas Berggruen. In 2016, its endowment was assessed at $500 million. Its associated Berggruen Holdings has net equity in excess of $2 billion. The Institute is composed of two programmatic entities: the Berggruen Governance Center and the Bergggruen Philosophy and Culture Center. The Governance Center is dedicated to the design and implementation of new ideas of good government relevant to the common challenges of globalization in the 21st century through three projects: the 21st Century Council which is focused on global governance challenges; the Council for the Future of Europe to support European unification; and the Think Long Committee for California, a bi-partisan effort focused on reforming California's system of governance. Launched in September 2015, the mission of the Philosophy and Culture Center is to help bridge cultural divides, particularly between the East and West and to foster the development of new ideas.

Nicolas Berggruen, born in 1961, has dual German and American citizenship and is an alumnus of New York University. He is co-author, with Nicolas Gardels, of a book on political governance, *Intelligent Governance for the 21st Century: A Middle Way Between West and East.* The *Financial Times* named it one of their Best Books of 2012. Through the Berggruen Institute he is co-founder, with the *Huffington Post*, of *The WorldPost*, a media publication dedicated to global issues.

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Nicolas Berggruen honorsThe Berggruen Foundation's mission is realized through three

Governor Jerry Brown with the Good Governance Award at the Berggruen Institute's fifth anniversary party, Beverly Hills, 2015.

programs: the Berggruen Fellowship Program; the Berggruen Prize, an annual $1,000,000 philosophy prize awarded by an international jury (two of which have already been awarded); and the Beggruen Ideas Competition. There is a Los Angeles advisory committee.

Charles Taylor was chosen for the prize by an independent nine-member jury headed by philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah. It is awarded to a thinker whose ideas are of broad significance for shaping human self-understanding and the advancement of humanity. British philosopher Onora O'Neil won the second prize in 2017.

The Nicolas Berggruen Institute could be classified as a research think tank, an institution that fosters research on current issues and provides interpretation of that research. According to the Harvard Kennedy School Library, there are approximately 690 research think tanks globally, with a high preponderance located in the United States.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, recipient of the first Berggruen Prize, 2016.

It might be a stretch to draw parallels, but it would be fair to say that the Aspen Institute and the Salzburg Global Seminars offer some similarities in terms of their humanistic objectives. Both have managed to be influential in stimulating discourse and in initiating new ideas.

Although the Berggruen Institute has yet to establish its own independent physical presence in Los Angeles, two facilities are in their planning stages. Its major facility, being designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, will occupy 447 acres on a hilltop site in the Santa Monica Mountains (projected completion ca. 2022). Called the "Scholars Campus," it fulfills the Institute's vision to create a private educational forum where distinguished scholars and thought leaders can both reflect and connect.

Simulated image of Berggruen Institute site, Santa Monica Mountains in the background.

Herzog & de Meuron, preliminary design.

The complex will contain a conference room, a water tower, a scholar's village, Berggruen's personal residence and several cottages. Berggruen said that this environment will allow scholars to "think, live, convene, and to gather groups to think, discuss and produce ideas."

MacArthur Park, Downtown Los Angeles

A secondary site will be located in a yet-to-be renovated building in Downtown Los Angeles in proximity to MacArthur Park (projected completion ca. 2019). The Spanish architectural firm, Selgascano, will plan the building's renovation. In contrast to its mountaintop site suitable for contemplation, here it hopes to connect scholars with an urban environment and stimulate their thinking about issues

affecting concentrated population centers which, today, are becoming more numerous and an increasing segment of the world's population. According to the United Nations Population Fund, "The world is undergoing the largest wave of urban growth in history… the world's population grew rapidly (from 220 million to 2.8 billion) over the 20th century… More than half of the world's population now lives in towns and cities, and by 2030 this number will swell to about 5 billion."At a recent press conference in New York, the Institute's president, Craig Calhoun, made this comparison with regard to the separate locations. He said that it would be like "going to Princeton, but then going to Brooklyn – the center of ferment."

In addition, The Berggruen Institute has a staff presence and maintains a facility in Beijing, China. Although not a programmatic element of the Berggruen Institute, the Museum Berggruen, an entity of the National Gallery in Berlin, with collections of major works by Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, Georges Braque, Alberto Giacometti, and other early twentieth century masters, serves as a monument to the German-born Parisian art dealer Heinz Berggruen, father of Nicolas. On October 18, the Berggruenn Institute collaborated with the *Los Angeles Times* on a public program, "The View from California," as part of the Berggruen Institute's Great Transformations Series. The October 18, program was divided into two sections: "Conversation: The View from Washington." featured Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic leader, followed by a panel : "The View from California." featured Democratic and Republican politicians, a labor leader, a political scientist and the LA Times Sacramento bureau chief serving as moderator.

The *Los Angeles Times* event was only a blip on the Institute's ambitious programming schedule. Recent and current activities can be found at http://berggruen.org/activities:

November 3, 2015
Chinese President Xi Jinping met with the 21st Century Council in Beijing

December 16, 2016
21st Century Council met to Discuss Salvaging Globalization

May 8, 2017
Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti Offered a Vision for America

September 17, 2017
Renovating Democracy for the Digital Age Project Convened in Montreal

Global Fellowship Program will give thinkers the opportunity to study, work and live at leading universities in China, the United States, and the United Kingdom initially, including, Harvard University's (School of Divinity), Stanford University's Center for Advanced Study in the

Behavioral Sciences (CASBS), UCLA, NYU, University of Cambridge, Tsinghua University and Peking University. These efforts will result in symposia, video and written materials including articles and books.

The library of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University lists these other think tanks in California: Claremont Institute, Hoover Institution, Independent Institute, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Ayn Rand Institute, Institute for Historical Review, Milken Institute, Public Policy Institute of California, and Public Banking Institute. Each one has a specific focus; none of them parallels the Berggruen Institute.

(Featured image: Berggruen Council for Future of Europe, Global issues conference sponsored by the Berggruen Institute, Paris, Sciences Po, 2013.)

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