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Report on Participating in the 4. Annual Meeting, Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), Mohegan Sun Convention Center, Uncasville, CT, USA, 03.-06. Juni 2012

The Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA)¹ is a professional organization that seeks to bring together scholars and activists from around the world to share and discuss their projects and experience regarding past, present, and future of indigenous communities on a global scale. NAISA has recently been founded over a period of several years and is still in the process of establishing and negotiating working practices that the council and membership call for and that are useful in furthering exchange and advancements of Native-based interdisciplinary theory making as well as the acknowledgement of ongoing and new activities inside and outside educational facilities that bring indigenous voices to the front.

The Fourth Annual Meeting was held at the Mohegan Sun Convention Center in Uncasville, Connecticut, USA, June 3-6, 2012. The Convention Center is part of the Mohegan Sun Resort, the second largest casino in the United States, owned and operated by the Mohegan tribe. John Low, the chair of our panel on Wednesday morning, aptly described the conference venue as the place where “sovereignty and capitalism are firmly wrapped around each other”.

Mohegan Sun is located in southeast Connecticut along the banks of the Thames River. It was opened in 1996, shortly after the Mohegan tribe had received federal recognition, which paved the way for opening a large-scale casino. The interior design and the names of architectural features such as the various casinos, conference rooms, entrances, and surrounding streets highlight elements of Mohegan history and culture and show their close connection to other tribes in the region such as the Pequot, Shinnecock, Naragansett and many others.

This year’s host committee was composed of several institutions from the area: Dartmouth College, Harvard University, University of Massachusetts Amherst, University of Massachusetts Boston, and Yale University. These prestigious institutions not only raised expectations among participants but are also certainly the cause for a larger number of contributors than in previous years: there were more than 850 participants at the conference.

Such a broad conference design has its advantages and disadvantages: there are usually many presentations held simultaneously – up to 19 panels per time slot with up to 4 speakers, which makes it quite hard to select which sessions to attend. Apart from the session schedule, local organizers try to include other exciting events in the program like readings, film screenings, excursions, and a formal reception.

I took the chance of going on a tour to several local Mohegan historic sites during lunch break on Monday and enjoyed an evening with Indigenous New England writers that took place on Monday night.

My presentation “A Place to Present and Represent Indigenous Pennsylvania: The Lenape Cultural Center in Easton, PA” was scheduled for Wednesday morning. The presentation is based on my fieldwork and archival research, which I undertook last summer in various places in Pennsylvania as well as in the Library of Congress, Washington D.C. and the New York Public Library.

¹ For further information, please check the website: <http://www.naisa.org/> (June 13, 2012).

During my stay in Pennsylvania I was able to get a better understanding of the current implications of Indigenous-White relations in the area, which began to intensify from early 18th century onwards. My dissertation project focuses on relationships between American Indian and German communities and these encounters, along with many other interactions, continue to shape the past and present of Pennsylvania.

The Lenape Cultural Center in Easton is a place, which seeks to bridge different perceptions of history by focusing on Lenape culture as continuously present in the region. Members of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania are confronted with various reactions to the exhibit and their personal stories, which they share with visitors. These reactions range from fascination, skepticism, discrimination, and ignorance, often employing stereotypes and clichés. The situation illustrates that aspects of the early colonial period such as migration, the establishment of settlements, war, and relocation continue to influence the relationships and perceptions of Indian and non-Indian people today.

Our panel consisted of two presentations, as two others had been withdrawn from the program. Monika Siebert (University of Richmond) gave a talk on the establishment of the Virginia Indian Heritage Trail and illuminated the involvement of Monacan writer and activist KARENNE WOOD in the development of the Trail as sensitive to indigenous perspectives and as dedicated to the decolonization of Virginia's history, which has been so closely associated with and reduced to John Smith and Pocahontas.

Following our presentations, we entered into a discussion on issues of state and federal recognition of Native groups and the prospect of digitalizing history. In that way, our panel became interactive, getting also the audience involved.

Furthermore, I talked to several conference participants about a possible collaboration in realizing an issue of the German literary journal *die horen* featuring Indigenous literatures and arts. I was able to speak with Cheryl Savageau (Abenaki), Carrie House (Diné/Oneida), Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) and others about the issue, receiving valuable feedback for planning and realizing this publication.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Graduate School "Society and Culture in Motion" for their financial support, which allowed me to participate in the conference and to advance my understanding and research in the field of American Indian studies.

Halle (Saale), June 14, 2012