



Federal Ministry  
of Education  
and Research

# The European Research Council (ERC)

Excellent funding opportunities for researchers in the socio-economic sciences and humanities at research institutions in Germany



RESEARCH





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# Preface



Science and research provide us with answers to important issues concerning our future in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the importance of research does not relate to technological development alone; research also gives us the ability to shape societal transformations in the context of ongoing globalisation and demographic change in many European countries.

The innovations and developments that we need result from visionary ideas. The European Commission founded the European Research Council (ERC) in 2007 with the aim of promoting frontier research in the borderline areas of knowledge. In this way, the European Commission paved the way for the financing of fundamental research on a European level. The dividing lines between fundamental and applied research and between traditional disciplines have faded into the background, whereas innovation and the pioneering role of scientific findings have moved to the forefront.

This brochure introduces researchers at research institutions in Germany who are being supported by the ERC. The selected researchers demonstrate that the ERC's bottom-up funding model is opening up a diverse range of opportunities to the socio-economic sciences and humanities in particular. It is hoped that the success of the researchers presented here will especially encourage young researchers to take advantage of the

ERC's diverse funding options themselves. After all, ERC funding is increasingly being seen as a symbol of quality for research institutions and also for researchers' individual careers.

The ERC is creating new opportunities for researchers to do research work, for academic dialogue and cooperation. For this reason, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research strongly supported the founding of the ERC, and we also wish to continue to strengthen frontier research with the support of the ERC as part of "Horizon 2020", the new European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. This will make Europe more attractive as a research location to talented researchers from all over the world. With the ERC, we can harness new potential in European science and research and strengthen Europe's competitiveness and innovative capacity. This will also lead to new opportunities for German researchers to propose and implement their ideas. I invite you to join us on our journey that will lead to the establishment of strong European research in all areas.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Johanna Wanka". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Prof. Dr. Johanna Wanka  
Federal Minister of Education and Research



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# The European Research Council (ERC)

The European Research Council (ERC) is the first pan-European funding body for frontier research and was set up in 2007 under the EU's Seventh Framework Programme for Research. It is aimed at individual researchers of any nationality who wish to carry out a research project in Europe.

## Characteristics of funding from ERC

- **“Bottom-up” structure for research projects**
- **Research autonomy**
- **Funding for “frontier research”**
- **Funding for individual researchers – no consortia**
- **Research excellence as the sole selection criterion**
- **Unbureaucratic and transparent procedures**

## The funding schemes up to 2013

- **Starting Grants for young researchers (2 to 7 years after their PhD) with up to € 2 million for up to five years**
- **Consolidator Grants for young researchers (7 to 12 years after their PhD) with up to € 2.75 million for up to five years**
- **Advanced Grants for excellent established researchers with up to € 3.5 million for up to five years**
- **Synergy Grants for groups of between two and four excellent researchers with up to € 15 million for up to six years**

Researchers who have already obtained a Starting or Advanced Grant and wish to transfer ideas that arise from their project into innovations may apply for additional funding through the ERC's “Proof of Concept” calls for proposals.

## The ERC from 2014 onwards – Horizon 2020

Horizon 2020, the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, is expected to run from 2014 to 2020. The first submission deadlines for ERC calls for proposals as part of Horizon 2020 are expected to be in early 2014.

The ERC is regarded as a success story by the European research community across all disciplines. It also enjoys strong support from the main actors in European research policy. For this reason, the ERC may already be regarded as a constant in the next EU Framework Programme.

It thus appears that the ERC will continue to offer great opportunities as part of Horizon 2020 to excellent researchers in the socio-economic sciences and the humanities who have innovative project ideas. Taking part in calls for proposals represents a good opportunity for researchers to measure themselves in a competitive environment against the best researchers in Europe or even the world and to obtain third-party funding. With its grants, the ERC facilitates progress in innovative research areas.

An independent research council, the ERC Scientific Council, acts in a largely autonomous manner regarding decisions which ERC lines of funding will be announced and which application and evaluation procedures will apply. For this reason, these items will not be specified in the general documentation on “Horizon 2020”, but instead be announced by the Scientific Council every year in its work programmes.



## Projects in the panel "Individuals, institutions and markets" (SH1)



## Preferences in times of economic change

**Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln studied economics and Latin American studies at the University of Cologne and did a doctorate in economics at Yale. Her research interests focus on the analysis of the saving, consumption and labour market behaviour of private households. She is currently teaching at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main.**

### What is the most important goal of your project?

In the project, I aim to identify why economic behaviour changes over time and how the differences between various countries can be explained. What role is played by institutions that implement certain incentives, and what role is played by cultural effects? Specifically, I am studying the labour market behaviour of married women, for example: how do the significant international differences come about?

### What concrete results do you expect from your project?

On the one hand, the issues that I am examining in the project are of relevance for economic policy, and of



course I hope that they will be taken into account by policy makers. On the other hand, I also regard my project as being on the forefront of research activity. The questions of whether and how preferences are changing are also interesting from a theoretical viewpoint, for example: how can we organise welfare economies if preferences are influenced by the system?

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

I think it's great that the ERC project enables me to employ doctoral students and postdocs. We now have a small group here with common interests, which means that we can really move things forward. The result is fruitful academic exchange, every day!

### What opportunities are created by Europe-wide competition between individual excellent researchers?

We benefit from this competition as it gives all of us incentives to improve. The ERC creates productive competition. It is extremely fascinating to observe how Europe is getting more important all the time – there has been an incredible amount of activity in recent decades in economic research in particular. Thanks to the ERC, you look much more at what others are doing, and this improves the sense of cooperation.

#### Project information

**Acronym:** Transitions

**Title:** “The Role of Preferences and Institutions in Economic Transitions”

**Host Institution:** Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2010

**Panel:** SH1 – Individuals, institutions and markets

**Duration:** 01.03.2011 – 29.02.2016

**Budget:** € 1,398,900

**Website:** <http://www.wiwi.uni-frankfurt.de/professoren/fuchs/fuchs.php>

## Developing recommendations for regulation of the financial markets

**The economist Klaus Adam from the University of Mannheim works on issues related to developments in the prices of assets. Another focus of his work is the study of sovereign debt, particularly with regard to whether and at what rate this debt should be paid off. In this work, he can make use of his experience in the research department of the European Central Bank.**

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application?

It was helpful for me that I had already evaluated a successful ERC application as a peer reviewer on one previous occasion. This meant that I already had a feel for how the applications look, what they have to contain and what the peer reviewers expect. It would be helpful to many applicants if a number of examples were published.

### Could you explain your research project in three sentences?

We are investigating the relationship between financial market developments and macroeconomic dynamics. In particular, we focus on the effects that developments in asset prices have on overall economic activity and on inflation. On this basis, we then develop recommendations for monetary policy and regulation of the financial markets.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

The personal freedom to be able to carry out a research project of this scale and duration. This is really enjoyable!

### Do you have experience with national funding?

I worked at the European Central Bank for some time, i.e. outside of academia, so my experience on the national level is rather limited. However, I have submitted applications for funding to the German Research Foundation (DFG).

### What do you regard as being the advantages of funding from the ERC? Are there any disadvantages?

The funding allows for more intensive research work, and you are freed from teaching duties to a certain degree. I can't see any disadvantages yet – but maybe that will come with the intermediate report, depending on how time-consuming it proves to be.

### In your opinion, what opportunities are offered by Europe-wide competition between individual excellent researchers?

European competition leads to an overall increase in the quality of the research output. This represents a major opportunity. There are also the improved international links among researchers. Networks are created that are organised around certain reference points. All in all, this is definitely beneficial for the organisation of the research community.



### Project information

**Acronym:** Boom & Bust Cycles

**Title:** “Boom and Bust Cycles in Asset Prices: Real Implications and Monetary Policy Options”

**Host Institution:** University of Mannheim

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Klaus Adam

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH1 – Individuals, institutions and markets

**Duration:** 01.09.2011 – 31.08.2016

**Budget:** € 769,440

**Website:** <http://adam.vwl.uni-mannheim.de/1528.0.html>



## The effects of income risks

**Christian Bayer** earned a doctorate in Dortmund and has carried out research in Milan, Florence and at Yale. He has been Professor of Economics at the University of Bonn since 2008. His research interests include the effects on the overall economy of temporally fluctuating uncertainty in micro-economic decisions: e.g. the consequences for the health of the economy of temporal fluctuations in private savings decisions that result from changes in the uncertainty of individual private households concerning their future income.

### How did you find out about the ERC call for proposals?

I already heard about the first round of calls for proposals five years ago in the press and from a colleague. I applied and was unsuccessful, so I tried again two years later.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

Thanks to the ERC project, I have the opportunity to concentrate on research that I find interesting.

### What was your experience with the interview in Brussels?

Professional, friendly, and focused on my application.

### How would you rate the evaluation procedure of the ERC? Are there advantages or disadvantages compared to national procedures?

I think the ERC procedure is better in comparison, as the academic level of the peer reviewers is higher and the panels are moreover international in their makeup.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

I think there is a positive influence as the ERC exposes strengths and weaknesses quite clearly as a promoter of international competition.

### When you compare yourself with other researchers in your discipline in Germany, what is special about your professional profile?

Unlike other well-published young economists here I hadn't worked abroad before my doctorate, so I would



describe myself as being very much rooted in the German system. This might be a difference between myself and others.

### What advice would you give to young researchers to prepare themselves for international competition?

If possible, you should do your doctorate within the framework of a postgraduate school. Seek out and build up your international contacts at an early stage. You should also liberate yourself from the specific research focuses of your thesis advisor, and should identify and work on your own topic.

### Project information

**Acronym:** HUMP

**Title:** “Heterogeneity, Uncertainty and Macroeconomic Performance”

**Host Institution:** University of Bonn

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Christian Bayer

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH1 – Individuals, institutions and markets

**Duration:** 01.01.2012 – 31.12.2015

**Budget:** € 878,800

**Website:** <http://www.wiwi.uni-bonn.de/bayer>

## Research on financial regulation

**Roman Inderst is Professor of Economics and Finance in the House of Finance at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. He was awarded a Leibniz Prize in 2011. The “Handelsblatt” has named him the best German-speaking researcher in economics on a number of occasions.**

### How did you find out about the ERC call for proposals?

The university’s executive board recommended to apply.

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

I submitted my application back in the first round. At that time, nobody had any experience with the procedure. I was motivated by the university’s executive board and by the prospect of being able to submit an application in as unbureaucratic a manner as possible.

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application? Were there any particular challenges?

No, the support I received from the university was extremely good.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

That carrying out the project is more bureaucratic than I thought initially – for example, the timesheets that have to be filled in.

### Do you have previous experience in other EU projects?

No, not with EU projects. I only had previous experience with national projects in the United Kingdom and with the German Research Foundation too.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

In my opinion, its influence is not particularly strong in economics in Germany, although maybe things are different in the natural sciences.

### What needs to change at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

One problem for me is that one cannot finance stipends using an ERC grant. The ability to use these

funds for stipends would make everything a lot more flexible and link the funding to the running of a postgraduate school. However, the ERC is tailored for projects and thus for the running of an academic department. And that is not necessarily the best way for my area, which is economics.

### What are the particular strengths of the social sciences and humanities in Germany when compared with other countries? What are the specific German features?

There is a difference in level in economics when compared to the United Kingdom or the USA. What’s more, you can reduce your teaching duties in other countries to a greater extent and spend more time on research, although the ERC grant is helpful too in this regard.



### Project information

**Acronym:** RRF

**Title:** “Regulating Retail Finance”

**Host Institution:** Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Roman Inderst

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2008

**Panel:** SH1 – Individuals, institutions and markets

**Duration:** 01.05.2009 – 30.04.2014

**Budget:** € 1,329,840

**Website:** <http://www.wiwi.uni-frankfurt.de/de/abteilungen/finance/lehrstuhl/prof-dr-roman-inderst/team/prof-dr-roman-inderst.html>

## Dynamic mechanism design

**After studying mathematics and economics in Jerusalem, Benny Moldovanu earned a doctorate at the University of Bonn under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Reinhard Selten, who holds a Nobel Prize for economics. He became a professor at the University of Mannheim in 1995 and returned to Bonn in 2002. Since then, he has been a visiting academic on a number of occasions in the UK and US.**

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

It appeared that the preparations weren't that difficult compared to other application procedures. The funding amounts were not insignificant and the opportunities for doing something with this funding looked attractive.

### To what extent has the ERC grant affected your career?

I am now 50, so I am no longer the youngest researcher. This ERC grant allows me to reduce my teaching duties, so I now have more time for research than I used to. This is the main advantage for me compared to all other types of funding that I am aware of.

### What is special about your professional profile when compared to other researchers in your field?

Nothing, actually. There are a number of researchers who do very similar work at good universities. There are others who perhaps don't have the same status internationally, but I don't regard myself as someone special.

### What are the particular strengths of the social sciences and humanities in Germany when compared with other countries?

When compared with the natural sciences in Germany, the social sciences and humanities appear to be less focused on international focus and presence. Germany is a large country with a strong culture, so a humanities specialist can be active solely in the German-speaking world and still have a significant audience. This is the main reason for the weaker emphasis on an international approach and international networking.

### Are there opportunities for researchers to prepare themselves for competition at international level in the long term? What advice would you give to young researchers in your field?

A good doctoral programme is very important. Postgraduate education must be structured, and should not consist of a dissertation where the candidate is only associated with one supervisor. More structured postgraduate programmes are necessary, where doctoral students learn more and come into contact with international aspects and research issues from all over the world.



### Project information

**Acronym:** DMD

**Title:** “Dynamic Mechanism Design: Theory and Applications”

**Host Institution:** University of Bonn

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Benny Moldovanu

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2009

**Panel:** SH1 – Individuals, institutions and markets

**Duration:** 01.05.2010 – 30.04.2015

**Budget:** € 1,123,200

**Website:** <http://www.econ2.uni-bonn.de/moldovanu>



## Dynamic model for industrial economics

**Volker Nocke studied economics in France and Germany and earned his PhD in London. He worked abroad as a lecturer for several periods and then became a professor for Microeconomics at the University of Mannheim in 2009. His research interests are in the area of industrial economics.**

### Could you briefly summarise your research topic?

The basic subject of industrial economics is the behaviour and strategic interactions of companies in goods markets. My project aims to model this interaction dynamically and to identify the implications for competition policy.

### What results do you expect from your project for your research area and for policy makers?

On the one hand, the modelling approaches that I have planned are important from a methodology viewpoint for my research area. On the other hand, the theoretical and empirical results on the effects of competition-policy measures will naturally also be of interest. They will help competition authorities to better understand their long-term policy options within a dynamic framework. This also has implications for legislators, who are then able to adjust the legislative framework where necessary.

### Project information

**Acronym:** Industry Dynamics

**Title:** “Dynamic Approaches to Mergers and Industry Structure”

**Host Institution:** University of Mannheim

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Volker Nocke

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH1 – Individuals, institutions and markets

**Duration:** 01.10.2012 – 30.09.2017

**Budget:** € 1,304,640

**Website:** <http://nocke.vwl.uni-mannheim.de>



### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

Publications are an important indicator of excellence. In economics, we are in the lucky situation that there is a large degree of consensus about the quality ranking of specialist journals. Thus a person's curriculum vitae and list of publications already tell a lot about their research achievements. However, it is also important to read their research work carefully. Past research achievements are probably the most important indicator of future research performance: one can generally expect that researchers who have carried out excellent work in the past will continue to do so in the future, too.

### How was your experience with the interview on your research project in Brussels?

I was unusually nervous. The interview is very short: not much more than 20 minutes, and the candidate may only speak for seven of these minutes. This makes it difficult to go into detail. There is not much time for questions, and even less time to think about the best answer. This makes things hard, as the questions are sometimes very general and sometimes very specific. The best tactic is to respond on the spur of the moment and not to be nervous.

### What opportunities are created by Europe-wide competition between individual excellent researchers?

The result is competition between universities for the best researchers. And universities want to attract as many ERC grantholders as possible as these grants are so prestigious and comprehensive. But these researchers will only come (or stay) if they encounter good research and teaching conditions. In this way, competition between universities is improving the research conditions and thus the research itself, too.

## Gender differences from a macro-economic perspective

**Michèle Tertilt has specialised in the areas of macroeconomics, family economics and growth. She previously lectured at Stanford University and the University of Pennsylvania, and has been a professor at the University of Mannheim since 2010.**

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

In comparison with other projects, your teaching duties are significantly reduced at the University of Mannheim when you have successfully applied for an ERC grant. This is not necessarily the case with other types of funding. This is a big advantage, alongside the prestige associated with an ERC grant. In addition, an ERC increases your profile on the European stage: word gets around, everyone knows about it.

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application? Were there any particular challenges?

Not really. I obtained samples from a few colleagues who had successfully obtained ERC grants and tried to structure my own application in a similar manner.

### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

I think it makes a lot of sense to evaluate excellence based on publications. I'm not sure that anything needs to be changed here.



### How was your experience with the interview in Brussels?

It was very challenging to present myself and my project in 20 minutes. That really isn't much time to make the best possible impression. The interview is quite nerve-wracking. However, I had done my research beforehand – seven minutes are allowed for the presentation and thirteen minutes for questions and answers. You are timed using a stopwatch, so I practised beforehand to make sure I kept to the permitted times. In the end, it all went very well for me, but you do need to prepare properly.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

I think it has had a very positive effect on the European research landscape. I know a lot of researchers in my field who have spent a lot of time in America and who often wondered whether they should return to Europe. Many of them have returned and the prospect of an ERC grant was a good reason in favour of moving back to Europe for many of them.

#### Project information

**Acronym:** GenderMacro

**Title:** “Gender Differences: A Macroeconomic Perspective”

**Host Institution:** University of Mannheim

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Michèle Tertilt, PhD

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH1 – Individuals, institutions and markets

**Website:** <http://tertilt.vwl.uni-mannheim.de>

## Projects in the panel “Institutions, values, beliefs and behaviour” (SH2)



## Innovation at the interface between cultural anthropology and sociology

**Kira Kosnick has been a professor of Culture and Migration in the Department of Basic Research in the Social Sciences at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main since 2010. She studied sociology at the Free University of Berlin and cultural anthropology at the New School for Social Research in New York.**

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

I had just taken up a position as a junior professor in Frankfurt, and it was clear to me that I wanted to start and, indeed, had to start applying for funding for research projects relatively quickly. I had to leave behind an already approved research application in the UK that I could not carry out as it was tied to that country. When I saw the ERC call for proposals, I thought to myself ‘This is what I’ve been waiting for’.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

I regard it as a huge privilege to have been able to work for a number of years in the way I have done. When you are working principally with ethnographic methods, heading a team is a major challenge as the members of this team are not replaceable. The fact that very sensitive personal data is collected means that the team is not interchangeable. This data cannot simply be passed on to another person.

### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

In research, we can evaluate the quality of applications very well. The question is always which criteria are relevant. I believe that successful ERC projects would often have had difficulties in many national funding initiatives as they are allowed to be and, indeed, are simply a little more innovative and lateral-thinking than in many national funding programmes. This is very positive.



### What do you regard as being the advantages of funding from the ERC? Are there any disadvantages?

I cannot see any disadvantages. And the advantages are great. An ERC grant is a very important step in a person's career. I can decide on my research activities based on academic criteria alone and can pursue ideas that probably wouldn't have had a chance in other funding contexts. In addition, a different type of mobility is possible: I am an attractive candidate abroad too because I am able to take the funding with me, so to speak.

### Project information

**Acronym:** MIGRANT SOCIALITIES

**Title:** “New migrant socialities: ethnic club cultures in urban Europe”

**Host Institution:** Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Kira Kosnick

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2008

**Panel:** SH2 – Institutions, values, beliefs and behaviour

**Duration:** 01.04.2009 – 31.03.2013

**Budget:** € 1,244,517

**Website:** <http://user.uni-frankfurt.de/~kosnick>

## Theory and empirical observations of political transformation

**Before being appointed a professor for Politics at the University of Konstanz, Christoph Knill taught political science at the University of Jena from 2001 to 2004. His research focuses on comparative policy analysis and comparative administrative studies.**

### Could you briefly describe the most important goal of your project?

The most important goal is, firstly, to contribute to the theory of explaining political change; a lot of research needs to be done here. Secondly, we wish to achieve a complete overview of the empirical developments with regard to changes in morality policies, which has remained a largely neglected area in political science up to now.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for the ERC? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

I don't have much cause for criticism from the perspective of an Advanced Grantee. The formal procedural structure is very good, as is the fact that the participants receive a number of peer reviews as feedback. In the case of the Starting Grants, I would offer the criticism that the procedure has two stages, which makes it more complicated.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

The ERC encourages competition within Germany. It is important for universities to attract researchers who have an ERC grant. The ERC also improves competition internationally. There is room for improvement in Germany in this regard: in other countries, researchers are more focused on obtaining ERC funding. This is probably because Germany has relatively generous national funding measures.

It took a while before the ERC became known, but ERC grants are now increasingly being recognised as an important symbol of quality in Germany too.

### What is special about your professional profile when compared to other researchers in your field?

It is perhaps important that I have co-ordinated quite a number of EU projects, worked a lot in international contexts and also published a lot on an international basis. A number of my publications have attracted much attention, so I am well known internationally for certain topics.



### Project information

**Acronym:** MORAPOL

**Title:** “Change on Policy Fields: the impact of international and domestic factors on morality policies in 25 OECD countries between 1980 and 2010”

**Host Institution:** University of Konstanz

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Christoph Knill

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2009

**Panel:** SH2 – Institutions, values, beliefs and behaviour

**Duration:** 01.09.2010 – 31.08.2015

**Budget:** € 2,056,800

**Website:** <http://www.polver.uni-konstanz.de/knill/prof-c-knill>



## Education as a lifelong process

Among his other positions, the educational sociologist Hans-Peter Blossfeld was head of the State Institute for Family Research at the University of Bamberg for nine years. During this time, he also initiated, built up and headed the National Educational Panel Study. In September 2012, he accepted a position as a professor at the European University Institute in Florence.



### Why did you apply for an ERC grant?

The very demanding conditions in the call for proposals made me want to apply. I felt that I could fulfil the criteria, and I also had a few good project ideas.

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application? Were there any particular challenges?

I didn't find it difficult to write the application. I liked the fact that one could obviously pursue especially risky projects here – I found this particularly attractive. The chances of obtaining funding appeared to be good and, ultimately, that was what made me submit an application.

### Project information

**Acronym:** eduLIFE

**Title:** “Education as a Lifelong Process – Comparing Educational Trajectories in Modern Societies”

**Host Institution:** European University Institute, San Domenico di Fiesole

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Blossfeld

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2010

**Panel:** SH2 – Institutions, values, beliefs and behaviour

**Duration:** 01.06.2011 – 31.05.2016

**Budget:** € 2,488,360

**Website:** <http://www.eui.eu/DepartmentsAndCentres/Political-AndSocialSciences/People/Professors/Blossfeld.aspx>

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for the ERC? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

I didn't like the relatively rigid manner of submission using the Internet, as the space for descriptions is limited. You always have to adhere to certain limits regarding the number of pages, and this means that you have to be selective. However, you don't know whether the information you select will be enough to convince the peer reviewers. This was a cause of uncertainty for me, but it obviously worked out.

### Has the ERC grant affected your personal career?

Yes, because I was the first sociologist in Germany to obtain an Advanced Grant. My university in Bamberg used this achievement a lot to promote itself, and it also supported me to get this position in Florence. The ERC grant is a symbol of the highest quality in research.

### How can German institutions improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

I don't have any complaints in this regard, as I always received every possible support from Bamberg University in preparing a successful application.

### What is special about your professional profile in comparison with other researchers in your discipline in Germany?

That is difficult to say, probably my international approach. Right from the beginning, I carried out a lot of comparative research on an international basis and was published in renowned journals. When you are active and established in this type of environment, a lot of things of course become easier.

## The effect of attitudes and preferences in policy issues

**Marius Busemeyer is a professor of Political Science, with a focus on Policy Analysis and Political Theory, at the University of Konstanz. He studied politics, economics, administration and legal studies at the University of Heidelberg and at Harvard. His research focuses on comparative international analysis of educational systems and policies, welfare states and political economies in general.**

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application?

It was difficult to write an application that was addressed to a broad interdisciplinary audience, but which at the same time provided enough information to specialists about the research gaps that were to be worked upon. Doing this was not easy, particularly on a limited number of pages.

### What concrete results do you expect from your project?

Answers to the questions of when and how political actors implement the preferences of citizens into concrete political decisions, and when organised interests are more important. This also has consequences for the issue of the democratic legitimacy of political decisions.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

Its influence is very positive. I think the funding programme is particularly effective in the social sciences, where the opportunities for securing third-party funding are getting more difficult in countries such as the USA. German universities can benefit here and compensate for other competitive disadvantages.

### What needs to change at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

The lack of long-term prospects for highly qualified young researchers is a structural problem. Universities should not only employ established researchers at professor level, but should also develop better career opportunities for up-and-coming researchers in the manner of the tenure-track model.

### What are the strengths of researchers in Germany in the social sciences and humanities when compared with others on an international basis?

I think we are now moving towards a more internationalised system where the excellence criteria are becoming more uniform. Traditionally, perhaps more emphasis is placed on formulating fundamental theories in the social sciences in Germany than in Anglo-Saxon countries. On the other hand, the social sciences in Germany seem quite empirical when compared with France.



### Project information

**Acronym:** INVEDUC

**Title:** “Investing in Education in Europe: Attitudes, Politics and Policies”

**Host Institution:** University of Konstanz

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Marius Busemeyer

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH2 – Institutions, values, beliefs and behaviour

**Website:** <http://www.polver.uni-konstanz.de/busemeyer/prof-dr-busemeyer>

## More decision-making powers for international organisations?

**Eugénia da Conceição-Heldt is specialised in international organisations, negotiation analysis, international political economics and the European integration process. Before working at Technical University of Dresden, she had previously been a visiting professor at the Otto Suhr Institute of Political Science at the Free University of Berlin.**

### Please explain your research topic in three sentences.

The project deals with the delegation of decision-making powers to international organisations. More specifically, we examine whether there is a trend towards increasing the powers of international organisations. There is also the issue of why certain international organisations have more power than others.



### Can you tell what is the most important goal of your project?

I wish to identify the causal mechanisms that lead to the institutional delegation of power to international organisations.

### How did you prepare for the interview with the ERC in Brussels?

I took part in interview training offered by the National Contact Point and also had a range of conversations with ERC grantees from the natural sciences and humanities.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape in your opinion?

I think the ERC has a very positive influence; Germany is now in second place in the securing of ERC grants. This provides an impetus for investment in top-level research.

### What needs to change at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

The amount of time spent on administration and teaching should be reduced. It is important to give researchers more time and space to carry out their research. Creativity does not come at the touch of a button, but instead results from stimulating surroundings and a certain degree of freedom. At many German universities, Humboldt's ideal of the unity of research and teaching is currently being implemented with the emphasis placed on teaching duties; it is difficult to reconcile this with research.

### Project information

**Acronym:** DELPOWIO

**Title:** “Delegation of Power to International Organizations and Institutional Empowerment over Time”

**Host Institution:** Technical University of Dresden

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Eugenia Conceição-Heldt

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH2 – Institutions, values, beliefs and behaviour

**Website:** <http://tu-dresden.de/phil/ifpw/intpol>



## Transnational arbitration proceedings

**Stephan Schill** works primarily on issues related to international investment-protection law, settlement of international disputes, and arbitration between states and private persons. He studied in Germany, the United States and France, and has worked as a law clerk at the International Court of Justice in The Hague and for an international arbitrator.



### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

Most important to me was the fact that this was individual funding. In contrast with joint research projects in networks, I can build up my own research group independently here.

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application? Were there any particular challenges?

I found the prescribed application structures to be quite clear. I had also looked at applications by other researchers. The biggest challenge – particularly for a legal researcher – was probably to formulate the ap-

plication in the appropriate language and to make it attractive in an interdisciplinary manner, particularly for the social sciences.

### How would you rate the evaluation procedure of the ERC in comparison with other national procedures such as the German Research Foundation and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research?

I am familiar with national procedures as a peer reviewer. The difficulty with the ERC is probably in determining how good a project is in interdisciplinary comparison. When evaluating projects for funding within a single discipline, I can quickly identify their relative strengths and weaknesses. Certain difficulties can arise here with the ERC, even when every project claims to take an interdisciplinary approach. However, the ERC sends its applications to five or six external peer reviewers, so this effect is hopefully balanced out.

### When you compare yourself with other researchers in your discipline in Germany, what is special about your professional profile?

What definitely sets me apart from others is my very international education and research focus. I publish almost exclusively in English in international journals and I am active in European and international societies. I also have experience in international legal practice. The (legal) research culture that informs my work is not just confined to the situation in Germany, but also includes the Anglo-American sphere. It is argumentation that counts here, and not status.

### Project information

**Acronym:** LexMercPub

**Title:** “Transnational Private-Public Arbitration as Global Regulatory Governance: Charting and Codifying the Lex Mercatoria Publica”

**Host Institution:** Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Stephan Schill

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH2 – Institutions, values, beliefs and behaviour

**Website:** [http://www.mpil.de/ww/de/pub/organisation/wiss\\_bereich/sschill.cfm](http://www.mpil.de/ww/de/pub/organisation/wiss_bereich/sschill.cfm)



## Projects in the panel “Environment, space and population” (SH3)



## Change of focus

**Before being appointed a professor for Developmental Psychology at the University of Hamburg, Claudia Friedrich had worked at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig and at the University of Konstanz. She is particularly interested in the development of neurocognitive structures and processes in babies and children and in neurocognitive architecture for the processing of language acquisition.**

**What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application? Were there any particular challenges?**

As far as I can recall, I found it rather difficult to ‘sell myself’, as this type of self-promotion is not really my thing. Apart from that, I thought the application was very brief and that fitted in very well with what I had planned for the project.

**Can you tell us what is the most important goal of your project?**

I wish to develop a methodically sound description of what happens inside the heads of babies and young children in the first two years of life. This description should be similar to those that can be created for adults, and it should fulfil similar requirements.

**And what concrete results do you expect from your project?**

This project is of interest to other researchers primarily because of its interdisciplinary approach. Up to now, investigations on language acquisition have always concentrated on adults alone. We wish to change this, as examining first-language acquisition can help to identify mechanisms that can then be encouraged in a targeted manner.

**To what extent has the ERC grant affected your personal career development?**

The ERC grant has been very helpful. It has given me a lot of freedom for my research – I am relatively free of teaching duties, which is a real luxury. All in all, the ERC grant has played a decisive role in my career.

**When you compare yourself with other researchers in your discipline in Germany, what is special about your professional profile?**

Thanks to the ERC, I was able to change the focus of my work and I am now working in another area. I had previously studied cognitive processes in adults, and the ERC application has allowed me to switch to examining the overall subject from the developmental viewpoint. This is actually a completely different area of psychology.



### Project information

**Acronym:** NEURODEVELOPMENT

**Title:** “A neurodevelopmental approach to human language processing”

**Host Institution:** University of Hamburg

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Claudia Friedrich

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2008

**Panel:** SH3 – Environment, space and population

**Duration:** 01.09.2008 – 31.08.2013

**Budget:** € 822,000

**Website:** <http://www.epb.uni-hamburg.de/node/1046>



How effective are decision-making processes in politics and administration?

**Jens Newig is head of the working group on Governance and Sustainability at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg. Previously, he had worked as a research assistant at the University of Osnabrück. He obtained a postdoctoral qualification in the areas of political science and applied systems science there in 2009.**

**What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application?**

It was a challenge to write the five-page summary, as I knew that this would be read first.

**What is the most important goal of your project?**

The goal is to obtain sound knowledge as to whether and under which conditions certain forms of governance are effective or not, as the case may be – for example, whether increased participation leads to more sustainability. Knowledge of these issues is of great practical relevance.

**What benefits do you gain from the ERC project?**

We have a great team here: the postdocs, the doctoral students and the assistants. Working with them is incredibly enjoyable. New ideas are also generated that feed into other projects. This is very enriching from a personal viewpoint, too.

**How would you rate the evaluation procedure of the ERC?**

I think it is good that a number of peer reviewers are involved. This leads to a broader spectrum of opinions and evaluations. I think this is also simply fairer than when there are just two peer reviewers, as is generally the case. When the procedure was complete, I was informed about everything the peer reviewers had said. It would be good if German funding institutions would also follow this practice.

**What is special about your professional profile when compared to other researchers in your field?**

My professional profile is very interdisciplinary. My original background is in the natural sciences, I did a



doctorate in law and have worked since then mainly in the social and political sciences, always with reference to environmental and sustainability issues. I think this is relatively rare. However, there are more and more career profiles like this. This is very important for subject areas that are already very interdisciplinary by their nature.

#### Project information

**Acronym:** EDGE

**Title:** “Evaluating the delivery of participatory environmental governance using an evidence-based research design”

**Host Institution:** Leuphana University of Lüneburg

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Jens Newig

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2010

**Panel:** SH3 – Environment, space and population

**Duration:** 01.04.2011 – 31.03.2016

**Budget:** € 900,000

**Website:** <http://www.leuphana.de/jens-newig.html>

## How long we will live

**Roland Rau focuses mainly on the issues of aging populations and long life expectancies, statistical methods in mortality analysis, and research into causes of death. Before becoming a professor for Demographic Research at the University of Rostock, his previous experience included work at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research.**

### What results do you expect from your project?

We want to develop a better method for predicting the development of life expectancy and mortality rates. The aim is to implement this method in the form of software that will be made freely available to the public. I am a great fan of open source or free software. We would like to make this tool available to the general public, ministries, political advisors and to associations and insurance companies too.

### Did you already have experience in other EU projects?

No, I had no experience in the area of European research or other projects with third-party funding. This was my very first application.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for ERC grants? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

No, not at all. The application procedure is described in great detail. I know of other application procedures where the requirements are much more vague. The positive thing about the application procedure was that I thought about what I actually wanted: i.e. what my research goals are and what important questions I would like to find answers to. In this way, you get a lot of ideas and recognise what is important to you and what societal impacts the project could potentially have. The fact that you dedicate time to these matters when preparing the application and coming up with ideas was a very unexpected positive side effect.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

The ERC grants are very positive in terms of the evaluation and external image of the research landscape. I



once heard it said that ERC grants are the crown jewels of European research. Of course, it is great when you actually have one of these crown jewels yourself! It is one of the quality standards that you can measure: a country with a lot of ERC grants is supporting young, innovative researchers.

### Project information

**Acronym:** ROMI

**Title:** “Rates of Mortality Improvement”

**Host Institution:** University of Rostock

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Roland Rau

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2010

**Panel:** SH3 – Environment, space and population

**Duration:** 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2015

**Budget:** € 498,600

**Website:** <http://www.wiwi.uni-rostock.de/soziologie/demographie/rau>

## More tolerance thanks to migration

**Magdalena Nowicka is a postdoc at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. Having studied at the Universities of Warsaw and Krakow, she then earned a PhD in sociology from the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich. She has written a number of research articles on geographical mobility, cosmopolitanism, spatial relations and European integration.**

### Please briefly summarise your research topic.

Taking Polish migrants to the UK and Germany as a case study, I investigate how migration changes the initial socio-cultural status of migrants. I am interested in how the migrants' encounters with other people in their new countries change their values and attitudes to societal diversity. I investigate the changes that can be observed in the migrants' families and friends back in Poland.

### What results do you expect from your project?

I think it is important both for academic research and for policy to understand how direct or indirect contact between foreigners can affect values and attitudes, and whether this contact contributes to understanding, interaction and ultimately even to tolerance.

### How was your experience with the interview in Brussels?

The interview was very friendly and focused on the project.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for ERC grants? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

The ERC procedure is relatively uncomplicated and transparent, and you get to know the peer reviewers personally in the interview. In my interview, one of the reviewers even read out an excerpt from my application and asked me for my opinion. I knew exactly what was evaluated positively and negatively in my application, and could react to this.

### What needs to change at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

Improved career security and more alternatives to professor positions are necessary. In addition, Germany

lacks a culture of recognition, of positive motivation. One should accept that good research is a team achievement, but one should also be able to acknowledge the successes of individuals.

### Are there opportunities for researchers to prepare themselves for competition on an international level in the long term? What advice would you give to young researchers?

Many young researchers in my field seem to suffer from a lot of uncertainty. I would advise them to remain true to themselves and to harness a lot of positive energy from this. If you pursue your own interests, you will also find ways and means of successfully implementing your own plans.



### Project information

**Acronym:** TRANSFORMIG

**Title:** “Transnational Transfer of Multicultural Habitus”

**Host Institution:** Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Magdalena Nowicka

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH3 – Environment, space and population

**Website:** <http://www.mmg.mpg.de/de/abteilungen/soziokulturelle-vielfalt/wissenschaftliche-mitarbeiterinnen/dr-magdalena-nowicka>





## Projects in the panel “The human mind and its complexity” (SH4)



## New methods for an old discipline

**The main research interests of Michael Cysouw of the University of Marburg lie in the areas of quantitative language comparison, language typology and historical linguistics. He earned a doctorate at the Radboud University Nijmegen and then worked at the Centre for General Linguistics in Berlin and at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.**

### Did you make use of the help offered by support services when preparing your application?

Yes, I was in touch with the National Contact Point in Bonn. The NCP looked at my application when it was almost complete. I also attended the National Contact Point's interview training course in preparation for my interview in Brussels.

### Please explain your research project in three sentences.

My project deals with research on historical linguistics, where I wish to automate the labour intensive work involved in this area. We aim to identify which generally time-consuming and tedious tasks in historical linguistics we could potentially automate. This includes identifying the point at which things become so interesting again that a human has to intervene, i.e. where a researcher has to make decisions.

### Project information

**Acronym:** QUANTHISTLING

**Title:** “Quantitative modeling of historical-comparative linguistics: Unraveling the phylogeny of native South American languages”

**Host Institution:** University of Marburg

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Michael Cysouw

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2009

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.01.2010 – 31.12.2014

**Budget:** € 1,938,000

**Website:** <http://www.uni-marburg.de/fb09/dsa/mitarbeiter/cysouw/kontakt>

Thus I attempt to breathe new life into historical linguistics by using computers.

### Can you tell us what is the most important goal of your project in a nutshell?

One goal is to renew the methods of our discipline while applying this new approach at the same time. In addition, we aim to establish new knowledge about the history of human languages and the spread of languages throughout the world.

### When you compare yourself with other researchers in your discipline in Germany, what is special about your professional profile?

My idea of automating certain aspects of linguistic research work will result in a new methodology that will overlap to a considerable extent with the natural sciences. This approach is not very widely used in linguistics yet and is thus rather extraordinary. This sets me apart from others a little.



## Multisensory integration

**Daniel Senkowski is head of the Multisensory Integration working group in the psychiatric university clinic at the Charité hospital in Berlin. After completing his PhD at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, he worked at the Nathan S. Kline Institute in New York and at the Department of Neurophysiology and Pathophysiology in the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf.**



### Did you make use of the help offered by support services when preparing your application?

Yes, a lot! I was in touch with the National Contact Point ERC a lot. Their responses were always very competent. I often called upon their support, even after I had been awarded the grant, and I benefited greatly from this support.

### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

The trend is increasingly in favour of emphasising quality ahead of quantity. This is positive. Thus the number of publications you have does not count alone; instead, the amount of influence your work has actually had and how often it has been cited by other researchers also is important. Applicants' contributions to work on committees and in organisational structures, editorial work and similar factors could also serve as an important evaluation criterion.

### How has the ERC grant affected your career?

The effect has been entirely positive. The grant helped me to become independent and gave me the opportunity to establish my own laboratory and carry out this project.

### What should be changed at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

Even though a lot has already improved in recent years, we still do not think and act in an international manner to a sufficient degree in my opinion. For example, there are many conferences where the main language spoken is German. This would seem to apply particu-

larly to the area of social sciences. Teaching duties, which are quite high in certain cases, are a further difficulty for many excellent researchers. A stronger division between teaching and research positions could perhaps create an incentive that would attract more top-class researchers to Germany and keep them at institutions in Germany.

### How can researchers prepare themselves for competition on an international level? What advice would you give to young researchers?

In my opinion, it is a good idea to look for an interesting topic early on in your career and then to carry out research on this area with great dedication and enthusiasm over the course of a number of years. Research activity should always focus on working thoroughly and continuously improving oneself. I would definitely recommend a period spent doing your research abroad.

### Project information

**Acronym:** Multisensory-Mind

**Title:** “The multisensory mind: From neural mechanisms to cognition”

**Host Institution:** Charité – University Medicine Berlin

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Daniel Senkowski

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2010

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.04.2011 – 31.03.2016

**Budget:** € 1,483,408

**Website:** <http://www.danielsenkowski.com>

## The sound patterns of languages

**Marianne Pouplier from the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich is currently working in the field of phonetics on the topics of articulation and perception, the establishment of phonetic-phonological theories, and speech-production models. After graduating from the Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg, she earned a doctorate from Yale.**

### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic and humanities?

That is a difficult question; one can always demonstrate excellence based on certain amounts of third-party funding and publications. I think citation indices are problematic.

### How was your experience with the interview on your research project in Brussels?

I found it to be very positive. I actually thought that the panel would no longer be listening to me properly because I was the last or second last person that day, but that wasn't the case at all. They were extremely attentive, and I found the atmosphere very pleasant too.

### How can German institutions improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

I think German institutions need to become more open and flexible in their structures, also in terms of possible career paths. The job market for academics in Germany has to become more open, particularly for young researchers after they receive their PhD. It is very important that they have better prospects for their own careers from an early stage.

### Are there opportunities for researchers to prepare themselves for competition at international level in the long term? What advice would you give to young researchers?

As a researcher, it is very important to find your own path. For this reason, it is advisable to go abroad for a while and to find out how research is conducted there.



### Project information

**Acronym:** SCSPL

**Title:** “Stability and change in sound patterns of the world’s language: typological, physiological, and cognitive factors”

**Host Institution:** Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Marianne Pouplier

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.08.2012 – 31.07.2017

**Budget:** € 1,499,748

**Website:** <http://www.phonetik.uni-muenchen.de/~pouplier>



## Finding the windows to consciousness

**Nathan Weisz was head of an Emmy Noether group of young researchers and member of the Zukunftskolleg network for young researchers at the University of Konstanz. He studied psychology at the Catholic University of Eichstätt, and earned his PhD on the subject of neuronal correlates of chronic tinnitus at the University of Konstanz in 2004. He is currently working at the University of Trento in Italy.**

### Did you have previous experience with national funding?

I had quite a lot of experience – I had obtained funding for an Emmy Noether project for example.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for the ERC grants? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

No, I think the overall procedure is very good. The amount of effort required from the applicants is also reasonable when you consider the funding budget involved.

### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

This question is difficult, as the social sciences, economics and humanities are of course very diverse. One should probably apply different standards to a philosopher than to my research areas, which are located somewhere between psychology and neuroscience. It is difficult to specify the evaluation criteria that are appropriate. I wouldn't particularly like to be a peer reviewer.

### How was your experience with the interview in Brussels?

I thought the interview with my particular panel was very pleasant. I was welcomed and received in a very friendly manner. However, you shouldn't let it bother you that the peer reviewers might sometimes appear inattentive due to the volume of presentations that they have to listen to.

### Are there opportunities for researchers to prepare themselves for competition on an international level? What advice would you give to young researchers for their career?

You have to find a thematic niche that you will really enjoy and that will motivate you. After that, it is important to apply even for smaller amounts of funding at an early stage. Young researchers should learn that independence is worthwhile – particularly from a financial viewpoint. I think this is an important piece of experience which is often forgotten.



### Project information

**Acronym:** Win2Con

**Title:** “Brain-State Dependent Perception: Finding the Windows to Consciousness”

**Host Institution:** University of Trento

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Nathan Weisz

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.05.2012 – 30.04.2017

**Website:** <https://sites.google.com/site/obobcimec/>

## The origin of phantom pain

The neuropsychologist Herta Flor works in areas such as the psychobiology, diagnosis and treatment of chronic pain and the psychobiology and therapy of anxiety and personality disorders. She is currently working at the Central Institute for Mental Health in Mannheim and at the Ruprecht Karls University of Heidelberg. She studied in Munich, Tübingen, Würzburg and at Yale.

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

I had actually been waiting for a person-specific European funding programme for a long time. The individual nature of this funding was important for me because you can investigate many issues in a better and more detailed manner this way as compared with a large consortium. Certain issues are well-suited to large research clusters and others are not suitable at all. This funding programme did not previously exist in this form. However, now it is here and I think it is really great!

### What do you carry out your research on?

In my project, we wish to investigate how phantom phenomena occur in patients who have had an amputation. How do painful or non-painful perceptions in an amputated limb arise?

### What indicators would you suggest for the evaluation of excellence in the social sciences, economic sciences and humanities?

I think it would be good if more attention was paid to the quality of publications and less to quantity alone. I would prefer if people looked to see if there have been any key publications that have advanced a given field as a whole. Have other researchers in this field taken up the applicant's ideas and approaches? The extent of the impact of a given publication should not be used as an indicator, however. I think all other indicators are not as important for evaluation.



### To what extent has the ERC grant affected your personal career?

Positively! I do think that it has opened doors for me. We have been able to make significant research progress, as this funding really provides excellent support. You can work very intensively on a subject, and publish too.

### Project information

**Acronym:** PHANTOMMIND

**Title:** “Phantom phenomena: A window to the mind and the brain”

**Host Institution:** Central Institute for Mental Health

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Herta Flor

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2008

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.01.2009 – 31.12.2013

**Budget:** € 2,334,000

**Website:** [http://www.zi-mannheim.de/herta\\_flor](http://www.zi-mannheim.de/herta_flor)

## The timing of speech

**Adamantios Gafos** previously carried out research in the areas of linguistic theory and cognitive sciences at New York University, Yale and MIT. He has been lecturing in the area of phonology in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Potsdam since 2011.

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application?

I found it very challenging to describe the feasibility of new ideas and their suitability for funding in a convincing manner.

### Could you briefly describe your research interests?

My broad research area is that of cognitive sciences, and more specifically we are concerned with computational and experimental phonetics and phonology. In short, our aim is to achieve a better understanding of time coordination of the movement of the speech organs.

### What do you regard as being the particular advantages of funding from the ERC? Are there any disadvantages?

One advantage is the opportunity to apply for projects of this scale and level of ambition. As regards the disadvantages, I would like to see more flexibility in the ERC deadlines once funding has been received. It is often not possible to meet these deadlines.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

A Europe-wide community of excellent researchers is being established in the conscious knowledge that science knows no borders. Researchers who are being supported by the ERC get to know one another, and this results in better opportunities for cooperation.

### How could German institutions improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

In the two years that I have been here, I have often heard people speak worriedly of the lack of prospects for young researchers. Solving this problem should be a top priority.



### Project information

**Acronym:** STIMOS  
**Title:** “Syllables and the timing of speech”  
**Host Institution:** University of Potsdam  
**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Adamantios Gafos  
**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2009  
**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity  
**Duration:** 01.10.2010 – 30.11.2015  
**Budget:** € 1,120,705  
**Website:** <http://www.uni-potsdam.de/speechlab/Adamantios-Gafos/index.html>

## Multisensory perception

The focal points of Brigitte Roeder’s research include areas such as multisensory perception, and functional and structural changes in the central nervous system that are triggered by development processes and learning. Before becoming a professor at the University of Hamburg, she had previously worked at the University of Marburg – where she also headed an Emmy Noether group of young researchers – and at the University of Oregon.

### Did you make use of the help offered by support services when preparing your application?

Yes, I did. The University of Hamburg’s contact for EU affairs even read the entire application and consulted with the National Contact Point on issues that were unclear. I obtained very helpful suggestions – for example, on how to write an application in a manner that would be understandable for people from other disciplines, and on which panel would be the most suitable.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for ERC grants? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

My application was very streamlined. All in all, the application procedure was very good and quick. I don’t have any suggestions for improvements. I am now active as a peer reviewer myself, and the instructions for reviewers were very clear too.



### To what extent has the ERC grant affected your career?

I have now been involved for two years and get certain invitations that I would not receive otherwise – to take part in national and international committees, for example. I was recently in the US at an international conference, where I had a poster presentation on my ERC project. I noticed there that the recognition value of the ERC is very significant not just in Europe, but in other parts of the world too. Again and again, I find that the ERC grant raises my profile.

### What are the opportunities created by Europe-wide competition between individual excellent researchers?

I think it is very important that it has been recognised on a European level that person-specific funding is very important and successful too – particularly in terms of research output. Researchers such as myself do not need anybody making sure that we cooperate with others. I like to choose my own partners, as I cannot carry out my research alone. The ERC grant really is an alternative that supports international networking by means of person-specific research.

#### Project information

**Acronym:** CriticalBrainChanges

**Title:** “Development and plasticity of multisensory functions to study the principles of age dependent learning plasticity in humans”

**Host Institution:** University of Hamburg

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Brigitte Roeder

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2009

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.12.2010 – 30.11.2015

**Budget:** € 2,396,640

**Website:** <http://bpn.uni-hamburg.de>



## Understanding multisensory experience

**Andreas Engel has been the head of the Department of Neurophysiology and Pathophysiology at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf since 2002. His work demonstrates that neuronal synchronisation processes are important in perception, attention and the creation of consciousness.**

### How did you find out about the ERC call for proposals?

I have already carried out many EU projects myself and acted as a peer reviewer for such projects. My participation in this regard started back with the 5th Framework Programme. When you are actively involved like this, you find out about the published calls for proposals at an early stage.

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

The fact that you apply with your own research topic is a particular feature of ERC projects. The major advantages also include the long duration of the projects, the relatively large project budget if you are successful, and the transferability of the funding. These aspects make the ERC very attractive.

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application?

It was an advantage that I had already been working in EU projects for a long time. I didn't find the preparation of the application itself complicated. The fact that one doesn't have to consult with a lot of other project partners means that preparing the application was in fact easier than with other EU funding programmes.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

I'm a big fan of European projects. You work a lot more closely with partners in other countries, and this results in intensive and broad networks. This is an extremely positive experience.

### How has the ERC grant affected your career?

The ERC grant has improved our research opportunities significantly over the grant's duration. In addition, the external visibility of one's own research focus is increased, and this is of course very relevant.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

I think that research funding from the ERC is very beneficial for all European researchers and not just for German researchers. The targeted support for top-class researchers will definitely continue to improve the level of research excellence.

### What needs to change at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

The traditional boundaries between disciplines are shifting to an increasing extent. The national funding bodies (German Research Foundation, Federal Ministry of Education and Research) do not always react to these shifts in subject boundaries and research areas. Maybe there are also not enough calls for proposals for interdisciplinary research. I think that there is scope for more to be done in this area.



### Project information

**Acronym:** MULTISENSE

**Title:** “The merging of the senses: understanding multisensory experience”

**Host Institution:** University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Andreas Engel

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2010

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.08.2011 – 31.07.2016

**Budget:** € 3,472,800

**Website:** <http://www.multisense.org>

## Real placebo effects

**Christian Büchel studied medicine in Heidelberg, Philadelphia and The Hague. Having previously worked for a number of years as a researcher in Great Britain, he has been the Chair of the Department of Systems Neuroscience at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf since 2005.**

**What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application? Were there any particular challenges?**

I really enjoyed it! I took my time with the application, particularly during the planning phase. I knew at a relatively early stage how I wanted to do it, but I thought about the structure alone for six months and didn't write a single sentence in that time. I am sure that this is a very unusual approach.

**Could you explain what your research is about in three sentences?**

In a nutshell, my project deals with placebo effects. Placebo effects always have negative connotations. It is often alleged that patients who notice an effect while being given a placebo are actually not really properly ill. I would like to do away with this notion. In preliminary studies, we have already shown that these placebo effects are real, measurable biological phenomena with perfectly normal neurobiological mechanisms. There are even neurotransmitter systems that are responsible for these effects.

**How would you rate the evaluation procedure of the ERC?**

The evaluation procedure of the ERC is definitely the best that I am aware of. In my opinion, the makeup of the ERC panels is first class. I already have experience of being a peer reviewer for the Starting Grants. Really excellent people were involved, and the assessment process is very fair.

**How can researchers prepare themselves for international competition in the long term? What advice would you give to young researchers at the start of their careers?**

I would give them very typical pieces of advice. You should choose a topic that you find interesting, as you

will then be more dedicated. Hard work is important, even if this doesn't sound very inviting. And of course you need creativity too. Ultimately, you should make sure that your work progresses in an efficient manner by getting good publications and choosing locations where you will really spend your time on your research and have as little distraction as possible.



### Project information

**Acronym:** PLACEBO

**Title:** “The placebo effect – a window into the relationship between mind and body”

**Host Institution:** University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Christian Büchel

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2010

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.09.2011 – 31.08.2016

**Budget:** € 2,499,120

**Website:** [http://www.uke.de/institute/systemische-neurowissenschaften/index\\_53591.php](http://www.uke.de/institute/systemische-neurowissenschaften/index_53591.php)

## The origin of sound change

**Jonathan Harrington is Professor of Phonetics and Digital Speech Processing at the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich. His research interests are in experimental phonetics, laboratory phonology, speech database development and sound change.**

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

I wanted to establish sound change as a focus of research here at the institute. I had been toying with this idea for four or five years. I also used this time to raise my profile with the ERC in mind. I actually wanted to wait another two years, but then the university's research funding body gave me the impetus to act: they thought it would be a good idea to submit an application right away.

### What is the most important goal of your project?

The most important goal is to identify the origin of sound change empirically. To this end, we carry out scientific experiments: we measure the physiological processes of speech production, the acoustic speech signal and how we perceive this speech signal. After this, the most important task is to explain the origin of sound change from these empirical observations.

### Project information

**Acronym:** SCATS

**Title:** “Sound change and the acquisition of timing in speech”

**Host Institution:** Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Jonathan Harrington

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH4 – The human mind and its complexity

**Duration:** 01.06.2012 – 31.05.2017

**Budget:** € 1,934,590

**Website:** <http://www.phonetik.uni-muenchen.de/~jmh>

### Do you have previous experience in other EU projects?

No, not with EU projects. I have never got much beyond looking at the extremely complicated guidelines. That always put me off, I have to say. The ERC was very different: it was immediately clear what they wanted and what I should do.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

The influence of the ERC is probably not as strong here as in other countries because the national funding available in Germany is so good. In this regard, we are very well off in research here compared to many other countries. For this reason, I don't think the ERC plays such an important role here.





## Projects in the panel “Cultures and cultural production” (SH5)





## Europe’s elites in the Late Middle Ages

**Jörg Peltzer works in the history department at the Ruprecht Karls University of Heidelberg. His research interests include issues relating to the Middle Ages in Europe, particularly in the areas of political history, legal and social history.**

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

I was motivated by the prospect of being able to carry out fundamental research under ideal conditions and of having the time and freedom for things that interest me.

### Could you briefly summarise your research project?

It is concerned with the emergence of royal elites in Europe in the Late Middle Ages, and thus with forms of socio-political order in premodern times. One of the core issues here is which factors were interpreted as contributing to rank and how this rank was communicated.

### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

I think publication-supported evaluation is of central importance. However, I don’t think citation indices are



helpful here. In my opinion, it is also important to consider the conditions under which the publications were written. For example, there is a difference between publications written alongside teaching and academic administration duties and those that result from a pure research position. In principle, I don’t see any major problems here in humanities at the moment.

### What do you regard as being the advantages of funding from the ERC? Are there any disadvantages?

When the ERC grant was still unknown, there was definitely resistance to it: a young researcher with so much money, is that really right? However, this situation has certainly improved somewhat. In the medium term, the ERC definitely helps to make structures more flexible and fairer in terms of performance.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

I think the ERC has a positive influence, as it provides young researchers with an opportunity to obtain research independence at an early stage. The ERC supports high-risk research and thus forces people to look beyond established approaches, and that is always good for a given research location.

### Project information

**Acronym:** RANK

**Title:** “The formation and visualisation of the social and political order of princes in late Medieval Europe; a comparative study between the empire and England”

**Host Institution:** Ruprecht Karls University of Heidelberg

**Principal Investigator:** PD Dr. Jörg Peltzer

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2008

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.10.2008 – 30.09.2013

**Budget:** € 900,000

**Website:** <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zegk/histsem/mitglieder/peltzer.html>



## The cultural heritage of Christian Ethiopia

**Denis Nosnitsin works at the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies, which is affiliated with the Institute for Asian and African Studies at the University of Hamburg. Nosnitsin’s research focuses particularly on the history of northeast Africa, religions in Africa and the continent’s languages and literature. He studied at St. Petersburg State University and the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.**

### Did you make use of any support system available when preparing your application?

Yes, I was supported by the university, and by colleagues, too. Writing my project description would have been much more difficult without this help.

### Have you previous experience in other EU projects?

No, I have no previous experience here.

### How was your experience with the interview in Brussels?

It was very interesting and very positive. I was able to be very open with the peer reviewers in the interview situation, and they took me very seriously. Unfortunately, not all funding institutions use this type of procedure.

### How did you prepare for the interview?

I took part in an interview training. The guidance of my colleagues was also very helpful here. I think it is difficult to be successful in this particular competitive process if you are not supported by others. It is important to ask about other people’s experiences and to use this information for your own benefit.

### How would you rate the evaluation procedure of ERC grants? Are there advantages or disadvantages compared to other procedures?

I found the procedure to be good, compared with other procedures. There is less bureaucratic work involved, and the focus is very much on the subject matter and the individual. My impression was that the person behind the grant application really counts.

### What needs to change at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

The first thing that occurs to me is the general sense of uncertainty. There are cutbacks and savings everywhere. However, I don’t think an awful lot can be achieved with the ERC grants if the foundations are not good enough. In most cases, these foundations are the universities. Researchers cannot be expected to work and fend for themselves. In this regard, I think there are major difficulties, particularly with regard to funding.



### Project information

**Acronym:** ETHIO-SPARE

**Title:** “Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia: Salvation, Preservation and Research”

**Host Institution:** University of Hamburg

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Denis Nosnitsin

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2009

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.12.2009 – 30.11.2014

**Budget:** € 1,746,080

**Website:** <http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/ethiostudies/nosnitsin.html>

## Jewish communication in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

After studying modern German literature, French philology, theatre studies and legal studies at the University of Munich and at Sorbonne Nouvelle, Bettina von Jagow earned a doctorate at the University of Munich. She has been professor of European Jewish Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Erfurt since 2010.

### Please explain what you carry out your research on in three sentences.

The project deals with the history of Jewish communication in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – as the project title suggests. The sources here are exchanges of letters over the entire course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century between Jewish intellectuals and writers who lived in Europe, the U.S., Palestine and Israel. The aim is to reconstruct a history from the bottom up, i.e. a personal history of the consciousness of Jewish life based on these individual cases.

### Have you previous experience in other EU projects?

No, I have no experience in EU projects. I was involved in a lot of international work previously and had received funding, but this funding was from German institutions.

### How did you prepare for the interview?

I took part in interview training and showed my presentation to other colleagues before I actually presented it in Brussels.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

I always pay great attention to just who has received grants, and Germany always does well in international comparison. Major and, in particular, innovative and high-risk research projects are being carried out here in Germany thanks to the ERC. This European funding programme is thus making a very significant contribution to the innovative character of research activity in Germany.



### Project information

**Acronym:** JEWCOM

**Title:** “History of European-Jewish Communication in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”

**Host Institution:** University of Erfurt

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Bettina von Jagow

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2009

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.02.2010 – 31.01.2015

**Budget:** € 600,000

**Website:** <http://www.uni-erfurt.de/juedischeliteratur/team/prof-dr-bettina-von-jagow>

## Understanding the designs of Late-Gothic vaults

**David Wendland studied architecture in Darmstadt, Venice and Stuttgart. His main research interests include the areas of architectural history, construction history, vault construction, design processes and form-finding in architecture.**

### Could you briefly explain what your research is about?

I am working on how Late-Gothic vaults were designed – based on buildings that became increasingly complicated, complex and sophisticated around 1500. Research on this has been based mainly on sources up to now; but standard hypotheses do not correspond to the buildings actually constructed in certain cases. So we first examine the buildings and then try to validate the sources taking the structures as our starting point. Our observations are then linked to the sources.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

The trust that has been put in me as a young researcher. The only important consideration to be made here was to have a good idea and to implement it. I have also gained a lot of experience – in how to put together a research group, for example.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for the ERC grants? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

I think the procedure is transparent. It works and is self-explanatory. There are detailed, easy-to-understand guides for applicants available. I think the interview in Brussels is a good instrument as you can explain your ideas there.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

The ERC has a very important influence, as researchers with concrete projects are funded by the programme. In addition, the ERC will also lead to structural changes at universities. The mid-level academic staff has relatively little autonomy in research, but this will change in the future. The position of those who actually carry

out top-class research will be strengthened. There will also be significant improvements with regard to internationalisation.

### What are the opportunities of a Europe-wide competition between individual excellent researchers?

The quality of the individual research projects is improving. In terms of quality, this is the only way to keep up with the U.S., where stable financing of research is a matter of course. At the moment, the ERC is actually the only instrument that is having a similar effect in Europe. It is only thanks to this competition that we can carry out certain projects at all.



### Project information

**Acronym:** ReGothicVaultDesign

**Title:** “Design Principles in Late-Gothic Vault Construction – A new approach based on surveys, reverse geometric engineering and a reinterpretation of the sources”

**Host Institution:** Technical University of Dresden

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. David Wendland

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.02.2012 – 31.01.2017

**Budget:** € 1,091,160

**Website:** [http://tudresden.de/die\\_tu\\_dresden/fakultaeten/philosophische\\_fakultaet/ikm/kuge/forsch/publik/wendland](http://tudresden.de/die_tu_dresden/fakultaeten/philosophische_fakultaet/ikm/kuge/forsch/publik/wendland)

## Medieval texts in rationalist Muslim theology

**Sabine Schmidtke studied at the Universities of Oxford, London and Jerusalem. She is currently a professor at the Institute of Islamic Studies at the Free University of Berlin. She has also carried out research at the School of Historical Studies in Princeton. Her research interests are: history of Islamic ideas, Muslim reception of the Bible, interreligious polemics and apologetics, and history of Jewish and Christian ideas in the Muslim world.**

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

I found it attractive that there was a relatively large degree of freedom regarding the conception of the project, the structure and the budget.

### What benefits do you gain from the ERC project?

It is a lot of fun and facilitates significant progress in certain research areas over the duration of the project. It is seldom that one is able to conduct research with this level of intensity; the usual framework conditions often do not permit this.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for ERC grants? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

I found the clarity of the evaluation process particularly good. By this stage, I was also acting as a peer reviewer myself. I liked the division between evaluation of the person and their previous work, on the one hand, and the project, on the other. As an applicant, I had a relatively good insight into how the evaluation had been conducted. The situation is different in other programmes, where you often only receive excerpts from the evaluations.

### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

In essence, publications are the main medium where we as researchers communicate with each other, and we can also be measured based on our publications. However, I do have a problem with the generally very mechanical way that this is evaluated. It is not always enough to simply count the number of publications

and to base an evaluation on where they appeared. Work is not necessarily good just because it has been published in a “peer-reviewed journal”. A method of examining precisely what has been researched and how the work was done should be identified – but this is of course very complicated.

### What advice would you give to young researchers at the start of their careers?

Gain as much experience abroad as possible, and build up a good, international network. When starting out, it is particularly important to set yourself up in the right manner strategically and to make the right decisions.



### Project information

**Acronym:** RATIONALISM

**Title:** “Rediscovering Theological Rationalism in the Medieval World of Islam”

**Host Institution:** Free University of Berlin

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Sabine Schmidtke

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2008

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.12.2008 – 30.11.2013

**Budget:** € 1,864,760

**Website:** <http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/islamwiss/mitarbeiterinnen/professorinnen/schmidtke/index.html>



## Early modern drama and the cultural net

**Joachim Küpper has been a professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and of General and Comparative Literature at the Free University of Berlin since 2000. He studied Romance languages and history at the Universities of Bochum, Paris and Toulouse. He was awarded the Leibniz Prize in 2001 and has been a member of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina since 2010.**

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application?

I had major difficulties from a technical viewpoint. After all, I am an academic in the humanities. In the end, our research department filled out the templates for me. I really enjoyed writing the application per se. For the first time in a long time, I was able to prepare an application solely based on my own ideas and didn't have to get the agreement of colleagues.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

I employed young researchers – the doctoral students and postdocs – from abroad for the project. Only fifteen percent of them are from Germany, while the others are from all over Europe and outside Europe too! Even though I already had a lot of international experience, the international mix in my project team is particularly enriching for me. I get an awful lot out of this and can improve my skills in international communication.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for ERC grants? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

The effort required for the application procedure is reasonable when you consider the potential outcome. All in all, the application procedure was structured in a very intelligent manner. I don't have any suggestions for improvements.



### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

The ERC is very well regarded. However, we do not have enough ERC grants at the moment. We need to work on this. I think the ERC is much more important than national awards in terms of international reputation.

#### Project information

**Acronym:** DramaNet

**Title:** “Early Modern Drama and the Cultural Net”

**Host Institution:** Free University of Berlin

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Joachim Küpper

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2009

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.12.2010 – 30.11.2015

**Budget:** € 2,397,600

**Website:** <http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/we03/forschung/drittmittelprojekte/dramanet/index.html>

<http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/we03/forschung/drittmittelprojekte/dramanet/index.html>



## Redefining boundaries

**Andreas Tacke studied architecture at Münster University of Applied Sciences and the Technical University of Berlin and art history in Bonn, Münster and Berlin. He is currently teaching at Trier University. His research focus is German art and cultural history with its European and non-European implications, as well as the history of science and art of the Early Modern and Modern eras.**

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

Pleasure! Great pleasure, as I can now demonstrate the various facets of the social history of artists. This is particularly gratifying, as I was the only one in my discipline dealing with these issues – such as the training of visual artists in guilds – for a long time. However, the primary scepticism has now been replaced.

### Did you have previous experience in other EU projects?

No, this is my first European project. However, I also received approval for two larger German Research Foundation projects at around the same time as the ERC Advanced Grant. These two grants are worth around about the same as the funding for the major EU project and are also very important to me.

### To what extent has the ERC grant affected your career?

Very, very positively – both within my own university and externally too! It is great to be able to implement further ideas with various cooperation partners in Germany and abroad more easily than before. I am still floating on a little cloud and am glad that I have put together a group of staff members who will be able to work with me on this multi-faceted research project for five years without undue worries. My university was very generous in every possible way with regard to the implementation of the EU project. And because I have a W3 professor's position, the ERC grant has also had a noticeable effect in terms of performance bonuses.



### Project information

**Acronym:** artifex

**Title:** “Redefining Boundaries: Artistic training by the guilds in Central Europe up to the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire”

**Host Institution:** Trier University

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Dr. Andreas Tacke

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2010

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.06.2011 – 31.05.2016

**Budget:** € 1,665,117

**Website:** <http://www.uni-trier.de/index.php?id=38069>

## Understanding culture, improving policy

**The art historian Mathilde Arnoux is a director of research at the German Center for the History of Art in Paris. She is mainly interested in cross-cultural perspectives and how our perceptions of the “foreign” are formed.**

### Could you briefly summarise your research topic?

The project deals with the cultural relationships between France, the two German states, i.e. West Germany and East Germany, and Poland between 1960 and 1989. I am interested in how the visual arts deal with the notion of the real. This notion serves as a basis for investigating the acculturation phenomena of exchange and misunderstanding that shape and guide our relationships today. It is planned that the investigation of this subject will promote the development of expertise that will form the basis for intelligent, considered socio-economic policy.

### Could you briefly describe the most important goal of your project?

The project promotes exchange between researchers who are currently working in this area – on an

international level. The project considers the distinctive traditions in the recording of the history of art in various countries. In this way, the project emphasises the important role – among the humanities – of art history, which contributes to European structures with its particular manner of reflecting on central and contemporary issues.

### How was the interview on your research project in Brussels?

Challenging, striking, stimulating.

### What role does the ERC grant play in your personal career?

The prestige associated with an ERC-funded project makes it easier to attract researchers and institutions to participate in the project.

### What should be changed at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

It would be a good idea to facilitate organisational and administrative processes. Personally, I would like to see more emphasis given to the humanities. They are essential for the development of Europe at all levels: culturally, socially, politically and economically too. I think it is a mistake to cut back the financial support for excellent research in these areas.

### Project information

**Acronym:** OWNREALITY

**Title:** “To each his own reality. The notion of the real in the arts in France, East Germany, West Germany and Poland from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s”

**Host Institution:** German Centre for the History of Art, Paris

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Mathilde Arnoux

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2015

**Budget:** € 1,499,970

**Website:** <http://www.dtforum.org/index.php?id=7&L=0>



## Theatre forms in international comparison

**Matthias Warstat teaches at the Institute for Theatre Studies at the Free University of Berlin. His main research and teaching interests are in the history of modern theatre and culture, the breaking down of artistic borders, and theatricality of the political. In recent years, he has also presented work on theatre pedagogy and drama therapy.**

### How did you find out about the ERC call for proposals?

I had previously applied for a Starting Grant with a similar research project, but this application ultimately wasn't successful. After this, I continued to keep an eye on the ERC calls for proposals, as I wanted to try again.

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

I thought that my research topic was well suited for this type of call for proposals. It deals with forms of applied theatre, such as theatre in war and crisis areas, in social projects or in dealing with traumatic experiences – international comparison is particularly interesting here. It is a quite complex project, and also involves significant personnel and travel expenses. Thus the project was suitable not only in terms of research subject matter, but also with regard to the funding offered by the ERC.

### Did you already have experience in other EU projects?

No, but my experience from the unsuccessful Starting Grant application was important in retrospect, as the feedback from the evaluation was helping significantly for my second attempt.



### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

I think it would be good if teaching was taken into account in the evaluation, as teaching should remain closely interconnected with research activity. In general, the notion of excellence is very problematic. After all, there are no clear, broadly applicable criteria for the excellence of a publication. It is easy to make the mistake of defining excellence in terms of quantities.

### Are there opportunities for researchers to prepare themselves for competition on an international level in the long term? What advice would you give them?

It is important to follow international research debates from an early stage and to establish contacts with others who have similar research interests in other countries. In a relatively small area such as theatre studies, it is becoming increasingly important to publish in English too so as to ensure that as many people as possible in your field will take notice of your ideas.

#### Project information

**Acronym:** AestApp

**Title:** “The Aesthetics of Applied Theatre”

**Host Institution:** Free University of Berlin

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Matthias Warstat

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Website:** <http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/we07/mitarbeiter/warstat/index.html>

## New approaches to classical narrative structures

**Jonas Grethlein studied classical philology and history in Göttingen, at Trinity College within the University of Oxford, and in Freiburg. In 2007, he became an Assistant Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and in 2008 he became Director of the Chair of Greek Literature at the University of Heidelberg.**



### How did you find out about the ERC call for proposals?

From the Rector of the University of Heidelberg, who didn't want to give me leave for two years on fellowships and instead suggested that I apply for an ERC grant.

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application?

The biggest challenge for me was the ERC's aim of supporting particularly innovative and high-risk research. It appears to me that these concepts have been imported from the natural sciences and applied to the humanities. It was difficult to describe a useful and honest research project in the right type of language required for the application.

### What is the most important goal of your project?

I would like to establish a new approach in narratology that links the technical analysis of narrative structures with philosophical considerations. This is the big idea.

On a more detailed level, I would like to achieve a better understanding of narratives from Classical Antiquity.

### How would you rate the evaluation procedure of the ERC?

The evaluation is very thorough, and a lot of peer reviews are obtained that evaluate the projects from both interdisciplinary and specialist viewpoints. The peer reviewer panel for my project had first-class members from around the world.

### In your opinion, what opportunities are offered by Europe-wide competition between individual excellent researchers?

In the context of internationalisation, this competition reflects the reality that applies for many researchers. A lot of researchers in the humanities are in contact with others all over Europe and in America. In particular, younger humanities researchers are publishing in English too so as to attract more international attention. Thus the shifting of competition to a supranational level is perfectly logical.

### What are the strengths of the social sciences and humanities in Germany when compared with other countries?

There are many important traditions here that we should preserve. I am particularly interested in the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition in philosophy, which has been beneficial to other disciplines too. Also important is the federal structure of research in Germany. It should definitely be retained, as a lot of good books have been written in provincial locations!

#### Project information

**Acronym:** ANcNar

**Title:** “Experience and Teleology in Ancient Narrative”

**Host Institution:** Ruprecht Karls University of Heidelberg

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Jonas Grethlein

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Website:** <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/skph/personen/grethlein.html>



## The symbolism of fear

**Lars Koch is a researcher at the department of Modern German Literature at the University of Siegen. His research interests include 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature, war in literature, the literary history of fear, and research on cultures of fear. Koch studied general literature, philosophy and history in Siegen and in Groningen in The Netherlands.**



### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

The emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches and the attractive proposition of becoming more independent in this way. I had previously headed a German Research Foundation (DFG) network and had some experience with third-party funding, so this application was the next logical step for me.

### Could you briefly summarise your project?

The project investigates how disaster events of all types are perceived – these events include industrial accidents, diseases, attacks, spree killings and similar occurrences. And how are these events symbolically normalised again, i.e. how is their capacity to make people feel vulnerable reduced? I am also interested in strongly fictional media formats such as TV series, feature films and literary material here.

### What indicators would you suggest for evaluating excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?

I think that the citation index is completely unsuitable as a criterion. In my opinion, the approach of looking at

the applicants' entire biography would be logical. After this, individual criteria should be examined: is there any experience with third-party funding, are there any international publications, and is there any impact on the applicant's field of research?

### How did you prepare for the interview?

I did four hours of language training every week – not just with a coach for English, but also with a philosopher who was able to discuss my subject matter. I had a graphic design agency work on the handouts, so I was able to distribute very attractive material.

### What influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

Much too little influence up to now. The ERC's image in the context of the humanities has to change so that it will have an appropriate impact and can influence Germany as a research location in the long term. The natural and life sciences are further along in this regard. My impression is that researchers' DFG profiles are still the central evaluation criterion in the evaluation of research excellence for other researchers in the humanities.

### What are the strengths of the social sciences and humanities in Germany when compared with these areas in other countries?

On the one hand, the humanities are very theory-driven. We approach issues in a very method-related manner. On the other hand, there is sometimes a certain lack of lightness in terms of argumentation. In addition, the humanities in Germany often read foreign research literature only after it has been translated.

### Project information

**Acronym:** Disruption

**Title:** “The Principle of Disruption: A Figure Reflecting Complex Societies”

**Host Institution:** University of Siegen

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Lars Koch

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2012

**Panel:** SH5 – Cultures and cultural production

**Duration:** 01.01.2013 – 31.12.2017

**Budget:** 1,291,000 €

**Website:** [http://www.uni-siegen.de/phil/germanistik/mitarbeiter/koch\\_lars/index.html?lang=de](http://www.uni-siegen.de/phil/germanistik/mitarbeiter/koch_lars/index.html?lang=de)



## Projects in the panel “The study of the human past” (SH6)



## Pioneering anthropological research in the field and the laboratory using the latest methods

**Katerina Harvati is a paleoanthropologist and specialist in Neanderthal evolution, the evolution of modern humans and the three-dimensional visualisation and analysis of fossil finds. Before taking up her position at the University of Tübingen in 2009, she had carried out research at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig. She is head of the working group on paleoanthropology at the Institute for Prehistory & Archaeological Sciences and at the Senckenberg Center for Human Evolution and Palaeoecology.**



### How would you evaluate the application procedure for the ERC? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

I didn't find it difficult. I quickly found what I needed and everything went very fast. However, I did receive support from our EU contact point and from KoWi, the European Liaison Office of the German Research Organisations.

### How did you find the interview in Brussels?

It was very well organised. There was a schedule and we all had very precise instructions and assistance. The technical support available was also very good. The panel members had lots of questions, but that was to be expected. All in all, it was a positive experience for me.

### What do you regard as being the advantages of funding from the ERC? Are there any disadvantages?

The advantages are that you get very significant support for quite a long period and have the opportunity to carry out projects that actually interest you. I don't really see any disadvantages. It is only natural that there is a lot of work involved.

### Can you see any opportunities for researchers to prepare themselves for international competition in the long term?

My studies in the USA and my work in the USA and Germany allowed me to work and publish interna-

tionally right from the beginning. My successful ERC application is ultimately a result of this career path.

### What advice would you give to young researchers in your field?

I would strongly advise them to publish their work in international journals. They should definitely participate in international conferences, present their work and not be afraid of doing so. They should take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself.

#### Project information

**Acronym:** PaGE

**Title:** “Paleoanthropology at the Gates of Europe: Human Evolution in the Southern Balkans”

**Host Institution:** Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Katerina Harvati

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH6 – The study of the human past

**Duration:** 01.01.2012 – 31.12.2016

**Budget:** € 1,288,200

**Website:** <http://www.geo.uni-tuebingen.de/arbeitsgruppen/ur-und-fruehgeschichte-und-archaeologie-des-mittelalters/palaeoanthropologie/forschung/page.html>

## Historical research to help us understand the world

**Hans-Werner Goetz studied history and English literature at the Ruhr University of Bochum, and he has been teaching medieval history at the University of Hamburg since 1990. He has established his own field of research in medieval studies with his work on the history of perceptions in the Middle Ages.**

### What motivated you to apply for an ERC grant?

There were two considerations. Firstly, this new funding instrument that didn't prescribe a defined structure was attractive, as you could develop projects according to your own ideas. Secondly, this was the first call for proposals for the ERC Advanced Grants. I thought the chances would be good mainly because not so many people would be applying. However, this proved not to be the case, as there were actually a lot of applications.

### Please explain your research areas to us.

The focal points of my research are all in the Early and High Middle Ages, between 500 and 1200, in very different subject areas: constitutions, social history, and everyday history and women's history too. The development of medieval studies today also interests me. However, I mainly study medieval perceptions, i.e. how

those who lived at the time understood themselves and their world. The project is also related to that area. It deals with the Christian perception of other religions in the Early and High Middle Ages (between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries).

### What concrete results do you expect from your project?

One motivation for the project is the fact that religion is playing a more important role again in contemporary society, and thus also in academic studies. Research on the Middle Ages may not provide us with direct input on how to act in today's society, but it does serve as an important reference for comparison purposes. In this way, we can better understand our own society when it is contrasted with medieval perceptions. In studying the perception of other religions in the Middle Ages in this project, however, we are not just primarily investigating a central aspect of this period often characterised as the “age of faith”, but are also researching an important component of the perception that Christianity had of itself at the time.

### In your opinion, what influence does the ERC have on the German research landscape?

The ERC did not initiate the process of internationalisation of research – this was already there to begin with – but the ERC has fostered this process to a decisive extent. If competition is a result of this, then it can be said that Germany has performed quite satisfactorily so far. From a research point of view, support for international cooperation has definitely been the more important aspect.



### Project information

**Acronym:** POR

**Title:** “Perception of other Religions”

**Host Institution:** University of Hamburg

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Hans-Werner Goetz

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2008

**Panel:** SH6 – The study of the human past

**Duration:** 01.04.2009 – 31.03.2012

**Budget:** € 579,999

**Website:** <http://www.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/personal/ERC-Projekt.html>

## Cross-cultural comparative history of the Middle Ages

**Michael Borgolte** studied history, German literature and philosophy in Münster. He has been the head of the Chair of Medieval History at the Humboldt University of Berlin since 1991. The focal points of his research are comparative European and global histories of the Middle Ages, comparative intercultural research on foundations, and the history and theory of medieval research.

### What motivated you to submit an ERC application?

A colleague encouraged me to apply. At first, I didn't think I would be successful.

### What is the most important goal of your project?

The comparative integration of approaches in cultures that go far beyond the confines of Europe during the thousand years of the Middle Ages, and research strategies for this area.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

The wonderful experience of working on a project with colleagues from other disciplines in a very intensive manner.

### Do you already have experience in other EU projects?

No, I have no experience with similar projects.

### To what extent has the ERC grant affected your career?

I am 64 and don't need to develop my career any further. However, the university did offer to extend my position until the end of the ERC project. So the project has indeed affected my working life! In addition, I was able to reduce my teaching duties and am thus more closely involved in research.

### What do you regard as being the advantages of funding from the ERC?

One advantage is that I was able to employ postdocs from four other disciplines (Islamic studies, Jewish studies, Byzantine studies and indology, alongside medieval history) that I otherwise wouldn't have come into contact with. I was able to employ people from abroad for these positions, and this experience was



unique for me. It is great for me to be able to carry out this project with excellent researchers from America, Israel, Spain and the UK. This would have been impossible otherwise. This was the one positive experience that really stands out.

### What needs to change at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

Researchers in the humanities need time in order to write books – they need the right environment. In this regard, more stipends for temporary releases from teaching duties would be beneficial. Of course, I can also see the disadvantages of this. The continuity of teaching at the universities in question is then put at risk. I don't see any solution to this conflict. Thus one always has to weigh up the relative importance of research and teaching on a case-by-case basis.

### Project information

**Acronym:** FOUNDMED

**Title:** "Foundations in medieval societies: Cross-cultural comparisons"

**Host Institution:** Humboldt University of Berlin

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Michael Borgolte

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH6 – The study of the human past

**Duration:** 01.06.2012 – 31.05.2017

**Budget:** € 2,491,892

**Website:** <http://www.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forschung-und-projekte/foundmed>



Between observation of patients in hospital, administration and natural history

**Volker Hess studied medicine and philosophy in Constance and Berlin. He has been a professor for the history of medicine at the Charité hospital and in the Faculty of Philosophy at the Humboldt University of Berlin since 2003. He has been the chair of the Institute for the History of Medicine since 2004 and his main research interests are the history of medical practice and the cultural history of psychiatry.**

**What motivated you to submit an ERC application?**

The prospect of being able to carry out substantial research over a period of five years. This only becomes feasible thanks to release from regular duties made possible by the ERC funds.



**Could you briefly summarise your research topic?**

I carry out research on the knowledge-generating function of paper technology in medicine between observation of patients in hospital, administration and natural history in the long term.

**What indicators would you suggest for the evaluation of excellence in the socio-economic sciences and humanities?**

I think peer-review evaluation is a reasonably valid indicator. This can take the form of publications where articles have previously been evaluated by others in the applicant's field or of third-party funding that has been evaluated by peer reviewers.

**What do you regard as being the advantages of funding from the ERC? Are there any disadvantages?**

The advantages are the large degree of research independence, the considerable amounts of funding and the long project duration. One disadvantage is the limited funding of cooperation research projects.

**What is special about your professional profile when compared to other researchers in your field?**

Acquisition of large amounts of third-party funding and my good connections across Europe.

**Project information**

**Acronym:** PAPERTECH

**Title:** “Ways of writing. How physicians know, 1550–1950”

**Host Institution:** Charité, Institute for History of Medicine

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Volker Hess

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH6 – The study of the human past

**Duration:** 01.10.2012 – 30.09.2017

**Budget:** € 2,475,600

**Website:** <http://www.charite.de/medizingeschichte/mitarbeiter/hess.htm>  
<http://www.papertechnology.org> (work in progress)



## The effects of colonial forced labour in Africa

Alexander Keese’s research interests are in the areas of the history of unfree labour in global comparison, the history of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the history of colonialism. He studied late modern and contemporary history, ancient history and political science in Freiburg, Paris and Aix-en-Provence. He is currently heading a research group at the Institute of Asian and African Studies at the Humboldt University of Berlin.

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application?

The question of the extent to which this application is addressed to highly specialised researchers from my area and how important understandability for a general audience would be. I had to find a balance between these two considerations.

### Could you briefly describe the most important goal of your project?

There are many works that identify forced labour as a phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa under colonial rule, but there is a lack of detailed studies that identify the mechanisms and long-term effects on African societies. This is the focus of our project.

### How was your experience with the interview in Brussels?

The questions were very interesting and fair. It was a unique experience for me to be standing in front of a group of 15 specialists. One could compare it somewhat to a tribunal, but it was actually pleasant nonetheless!

### What do you regard as being the advantages of funding from the ERC?

Funding from the ERC allows for a stronger international focus than comparable national programmes do. In my particular case, it was clear from the beginning that I work with an international team and that the output of the project would have to be addressed to an international audience. This also applies to good national programmes such as those offered by the German Research Foundation or the Swiss National Sci-

ence Foundation, but this aspect plays an even greater role in ERC funding.

### What is special about your professional profile when compared to other researchers in your field?

My consciously European focus is particularly noteworthy – not just as a grantee of the ERC, but far beyond this too. Also worth mentioning is my interest in working in various European research contexts and in different countries. Additionally, I have always made an effort to speak various languages reasonably fluently so that I could also be active in national research areas.



### Project information

**Acronym:** FORCEDLABOURAFRICA

**Title:** “ForcedLabourAfrica: Forced labour: an Afro-European heritage in sub-Saharan Africa (1930–1975)?”

**Host Institution:** Humboldt University of Berlin

**Principal Investigator:** PD Dr. Alexander Keese

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2009

**Panel:** SH6 – The study of the human past

**Duration:** 01.09.2010 – 28.02.2015

**Budget:** € 665,550

**Website:** <http://iaaw.hu-berlin.de/afrika/geschichte/projekte/forcedlabourafrika-forced-labour-an-afro-european-heritage-in-sub-saharan-africa-1930-1975>

## Lived ancient religions

**Jörg Rüpke studied classical philology and religious studies at the Universities of Bonn, Lancaster and Tübingen. He is currently regarded as one of the world’s leading experts on the history of ancient Roman religion. He has been a professor for Comparative Religion at the University of Erfurt since 1999.**

### What did you find particularly difficult when preparing your ERC application? Were there any particular challenges?

In my opinion, the biggest problem was the balance between original and high-risk research, on the one hand, and a description of the project tasks that was as precise as possible, on the other hand. This is really difficult for a topic where you don’t know what the end results will be.

### How would you evaluate the application procedure for ERC grants? Is there any need for changes or improvements?

I think it is very positive that the peer reviewers are obviously chosen from all over the world. The reviewers really have relevant knowledge and experience with regard to the research topic.



This is often not the case in other procedures. These are always cooperation projects that often have a broader subject spectrum. I think it is problematic that just two reviewers are left to make the key decision here.

### What needs to change at German institutions in order to improve the conditions for excellent researchers?

I think the main problem in Germany is that demands and workloads in the areas of administration and teaching are too high for excellent researchers. The better a person’s research reputation is, the greater their teaching duties become as their career progresses. Apart from that, we do indeed enjoy a lot of research support – with assistants, secretaries and other staff, for example, that researchers in other countries in Europe do not have. All in all, we have a very good, maybe even excellent library system. Thus many prerequisites are already in place here.

### Are there opportunities for researchers to prepare themselves for competition on an international level in the long term? What is your advice with regard to career planning?

My advice is to realise at an early stage that research is not just carried out in your location or in your own language community. The focus should be on international conferences, contacts and research funding formats – networking is key here. One should also obtain experience with other academic systems.

### Project information

**Acronym:** LAR

**Title:** “Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning ‘cults’ and ‘polis religion’”

**Host Institution:** University of Erfurt

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Jörg Rüpke

**Funding instrument:** ERC Advanced Grant 2011

**Panel:** SH6 – The study of the human past

**Duration:** 01.06.2012 – 31.05.2017

**Budget:** € 2,326,220

**Website:** <http://www.uni-erfurt.de/max-weber-kolleg/projekte/kooperationsprojekte/lived-ancient-religion/>

# Project in the ERC Starting Grant Interdisciplinary Panel

## Interactions between virtual and real life

**Thorsten Quandt has been a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Hohenheim since 2009. His research and teaching activities focus on the areas of media innovation research, online communication, social media and computer games. In 2009 and 2010, Capital magazine named him as one of the top 40 researchers under the age of 40 in Germany.**

### How did you find out about the ERC call for proposals?

I was a junior professor in Berlin at the time and there was an information meeting where the programme was introduced. I found it particularly interesting that the projects were not prescribed by the programme – and the funding amounts were of course exceptional. A type of preselection had already taken place at the stage of the information meeting, so I assumed that I wouldn't be completely unsuitable with my background. This was my motivation.

### Please briefly describe your research.

My project deals with the social aspects of computer games, and of online gaming in particular. We are interested in the issue of how people's everyday lives are changed by these games and, conversely, how everyday life affects gaming behaviour. The focus is thus on the interactions between so-called 'virtual life' and 'real life'.

### What benefits do you gain from your work in the ERC project?

I have gained a lot of experience from the project, and this experience has changed my research career significantly. My career would have been quite different if I hadn't received the ERC grant. One particular experience is that of leading a relatively large research group. I had to learn a lot along the way here. Of course, you also have to learn to manage such a large project in terms of financial management and similar matters, for example. And on a subject-related level, I found that the ERC grant has something of a turbo effect in terms of research: I can suddenly do a lot more in a much

shorter period of time. This is of course stressful, but then I chose this stress for myself!

### To what extent has the ERC grant affected your career?

To a huge extent. There is definitely a certain element of reputation associated with the funding, but it also opens up a lot of opportunities. I can do things that I otherwise would not have been able to do. The ERC grant really is the best thing that could have happened to me at this stage in my career.



## Project information

**Acronym:** SOFOGA

**Title:** "The social fabric of virtual life: A longitudinal multi-method study on the social foundations of online gaming"

**Host Institution:** University of Münster

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Dr. Thorsten Quandt

**Funding instrument:** ERC Starting Grant 2009

**Panel:** ID1

**Duration:** 01.01.2010 – 31.12.2014

**Budget:** € 1,840,200

**Website:** <http://www.uni-muenster.de/Kowi/forschen/projekte/social-fabric-of-virtual-life.html>

# How to write a successful ERC application

## Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Grants

The ERC provides funding for excellent projects in all areas of research. You may only apply if a call for proposals is currently open and you fulfil the eligibility conditions (particularly the time frame for years after receiving your PhD). All lines of funding are generally announced once a year. There are around three months between the date of the call for proposals and the submission deadline.

As there are no specifications whatsoever with regard to research topics and the application format is modified only slightly from year to year, you can start to prepare your application any time.

### You should be guided by the following questions when searching for a project topic:

What are the most urgent issues in your research area? What needs to be investigated now? What have you always wanted to find out? What subject are you particularly passionate about? How could you obtain new findings and, in so doing, address important knowledge gaps?

Note that the groundbreaking nature of the research is the decisive factor in the selection of projects.

**Important:** You should be aware that you are competing with others across Europe! Thus the applicants who are competing with you and the peer reviewers too could be from anywhere in Europe or, indeed, the rest of the world.

As a result, a range of research perspectives and approaches will be represented in the evaluation, and you should take this into account when preparing your application. It is thus important to bear in mind the current status of research internationally. German conventions in your area will probably play less of a role than you are used to.

The application currently consists of around 24 pages with information on your academic career (4 pages) and your project idea (15 pages and 5 pages for the summary).

Two aspects are evaluated:

- **The scientific quality of your project idea**
- **Your research profile**

The application is evaluated in two steps:

1. In the first evaluation step, only your profile and a five-page project summary are evaluated. For this reason, it is very important that you convince the panel members with these five pages in order to make it to the second evaluation step.
  - **You should make the peer reviewers curious about your research. Explain why your project will make a decisive difference. The practical feasibility of the project should also be described here. The description should be written in such a way that it can also be understood by non-specialists, as it will only be evaluated by the panel members. Thus you should look at the disciplines represented on your panel and at the panel members in previous years to obtain an idea of the level of prior knowledge that you can assume.**
2. In the second evaluation step, the peer reviewers get to see the entire application, including the longer 15-page project description. Here you can describe in detail what the project will look like, how you will put together your team and how the methods will be used. This part will also be evaluated by external peer reviewers.
  - **You need to specify and justify the budget you are applying for here. Consult with your host institution at an early stage and discuss your budget plan with the relevant contact persons there.**

You should be aware that the peer reviewers have to process many applications in a very short period, so make your application easy to read:

- **Identify your aims and hypotheses right at the beginning.**
- **Structure your text using elements such as subheadings and bullet points.**
- **Use tables and diagrams (legible in black and white).**
- **Emphasise particularly important sentences using appropriate formatting.**

Important:

- **All application parts must be submitted electronically before the deadline.**
- **You will need a commitment letter from the head of your host institution (template: Commitment letter).**
- **You must also submit a scanned copy of your doctoral degree certificate in the case of Starting/Consolidator Grants.**

Further information about application submission:

- **ERC's Guide for Applicants (a new version is published for every call for proposals)**
- **ERC Work Programme (is published annually)**
- **Contact the administration of your host institution and the ERC National Contact Point for assistance (see p. 61)**
- **"Submission of applications to the European Research Council (ERC) [Antragstellung beim Europäischen Forschungsrat (ERC)]" and "ERC NCP interview guide [NKS ERC Interviewleitfaden]", see information box**

### Submission of applications to the ERC



Further information on ERC funding schemes and details regarding the submission of applications and administration of projects can be found in the NCP's "Submission of applications to the European Research

Council (ERC) [Antragstellung beim Europäischen Forschungsrat (ERC)]" brochure.

The brochure can be ordered or downloaded from the ERC NCP website: <http://www.erc-germany.de>

### Preparation for interviews



The "ERC NCP interview guide [NKS ERC Interviewleitfaden]" provides information and advice on preparing for interviews in the second evaluation step for Starting Grants and Consolidator Grants.

The guide can be ordered or downloaded from the ERC NCP website: <http://www.erc-germany.de>

You may also request a list with typical interview questions along with an English translation of the interview guide.



# Who can support me?

## The National Contact Points

There are National Contact Points (NCPs) for all areas of the Research Framework Programme that provide support to researchers in submitting applications and carrying out projects. The National Contact Points are officially designated to the European Commission by national governments.

In Germany, the NCPs are affiliated with various institutions. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research's EU office acts as the first point of contact for the EU Research Framework Programme and coordinates the network of National Contact Points.

Further information and contact details: <http://www.forschungsrahmenprogramm.de>

## European Research Administrators

Larger universities and research institutions generally have a European Research Administrator who is responsible for all EU research applications and projects. They are your first point of contact before you submit an application. They will explain the standard internal procedures for applications for EU projects and they can provide assistance with administrative requirements and budget estimation.

The German network of European Research Administrators exchanges information within the Working Group of European Research Administrators at German Universities (BAK).

Information on contact persons at local and regional level can be found on the BAK's website: <http://www.uni-giessen.de/bak>

## Colleagues

You should always consult with your colleagues in your discipline and in related disciplines to obtain feedback about your application.

Your European Research Administrator will often be able to tell you who in your institution has already been awarded an ERC grant and whether anybody at your institution has acted as a peer reviewer in the past. Additional tips and accounts of other people's experience may also be available here.

## The ERC National Contact Point

The National Contact Point responsible for the ERC is run jointly by the EU office of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

The ERC NCP provides information to researchers and multipliers about funding programmes within the ERC. It supports researchers in preparing their applications for ERC grants. In addition, the National Contact Point provides advice to German research institutions on the strategic integration of ERC grants into their respective internationalisation strategies.

Information events and workshops on the submission of applications are organised all over Germany. Training courses for Starting and Consolidator Grants are also provided that prepare applicants for the interviews in the second evaluation step.

A newsletter and various publications on the submission of applications and the announcements of ERC grants are available from the NCP.

Comprehensive information on ERC lines of funding and the submission of applications as well as documents and schedules for events are available on the ERC NCP's website: <http://www.erc-germany.de>



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### The National Contact Point for Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities

The team at the National Contact Point (NCP) for Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities will provide you with up-to-date information and advice at no charge regarding the funding opportunities within the European Union's Research Framework Programme in the area of "socio-economic sciences and humanities" and on current developments in this area with regard to Horizon 2020.

The NCP for Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities works on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and is the national point of contact for all researchers from the socio-economic sciences and humanities who wish to participate in the EU Research Framework Programme. The team at the NCP for Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities is made up of staff members who have many years of experience in European research funding and whose own educational backgrounds are in the social sciences or humanities.



The services we offer include:

- **Individual advice on the Research Framework Programme and during the preparation and submission phases for the application as well as during implementation of the project**
- **Critical examination of applications and project outlines**
- **Organisation and implementation of information events, workshops and seminars**
- **A newsletter with current information on relevant calls for proposals, information materials, developments and news about interesting events**
- **A website with information on relevant issues from the EU Framework Research Programme and other important advice events/deadlines**
- **Individual consultation meetings with applicants**
- **We are also in permanent contact with National Contact Points in other countries as part of the co-ordination activities of the NET4SOCIETY network of NCPs; we can thus offer assistance with finding project partners, for example.**

You can visit our website at: <http://www.nks-swg.de/en/index.php>

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# I have an innovative project idea – First steps

1. Check if you fit into one of the ERC funding schemes.
  - **How many years ago were you awarded your PhD when the call for proposals was published?**
  - **Check the lists of previous successful ERC grantees and compare yourself with the grantees in your discipline.**
  - **Ask experienced colleagues for their opinion.**
2. Is there an open call for proposals?
  - **You can find out at the ERC NCP's website if there is an open call for proposals or when the next one can be expected: <http://www.erc-germany.de>**
3. Contact the European Research Administrator at your institution and discuss the following issues:
  - **Is there preselection of candidates or can anyone apply?**
  - **Are there particular incentives for a successful ERC funding application, e.g. bonuses or additional funding for personnel?**
  - **Do you wish to switch from your present institution to a new one? If so, then approach the relevant contact persons at the institution you wish to switch to.**
4. Register on our electronic submission system.
  - **As soon as the call for proposals has been opened, you can register online.**
  - **Download the application forms (B1, B2) for longer texts.**
  - **Fill out the online forms (A forms) with the help of your European Research Administrator.**
5. Write your application.
  - **See p. 59 [How to write a successful ERC application].**
  - **Consult the "Guide for Applicants".**
6. Consider what funds you wish to apply for.
  - **Estimate the budget in cooperation with the host institution (costs will be reimbursed by the ERC based on the standard rates for each institution).**
  - **Where necessary, negotiate your own position and the positions of your team colleagues, rooms, the right to award doctoral degrees, reduction in teaching duties, financing for major equipment, responsibility for "overhead costs".**
7. Obtain feedback.
  - **From colleagues, the National Contact Point, the European Research Administrator at your institution.**
  - **Revise your application.**
8. Upload the complete application to the electronic submission system in good time.
  - **Press the "submit" button, which can be pressed again every time the application is updated in advance of the deadline.**
  - **Adhere to the deadline to the second (local time in Brussels!).**
9. Have you made it through the first step? Prepare for the interview.
  - **Look at the interview guidelines on the ERC NCP's website.**
  - **Prepare your slides and obtain feedback on them.**
  - **Attend an interview training course.**

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