The Foundation’s Purpose
The purpose of the Foundation is to support and advance the humanities and social sciences as well as science and technology in higher education and research.
(Statutes of the Volkswagen Foundation, § 2)

The Foundation’s Mission
The Foundation is committed to encouraging ambitious research across disciplinary, institutional, and national borders and to supporting creative researchers in breaking new ground.
A Foundation of Knowledge

Established as an independent research funding institution by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Lower Saxony in 1961, the Volkswagen Foundation (VolkswagenStiftung) has a strong tradition in providing support for all branches of science. To date, the Volkswagen Foundation has allocated more than 4.2 billion euros to over 30,000 projects in Germany and all around the world.

Average annual funding in an amount of more than 150 million euros over recent years makes the Hanover-based Foundation the most potent private research funding foundation in Germany. The Foundation Statutes ensure its independent existence as a legal entity and its character as a common benefit organization.

Concept

Being completely autonomous and economically self-sufficient, the Foundation is free to develop its funding instruments and determine the topics it decides to support. As its funding concept is not rigid, the Foundation is able to meet the changing challenges facing modern society and provide the appropriate impulses for science and research. The Volkswagen Foundation constantly reviews its funding portfolio. Guiding principles are a preference for transdisciplinary issues and approaches, reinforcement of international cooperation, and support for the upcoming generation of researchers.

Priority is given to persons and ideas that dare to cross borders in more than one meaning of the phrase – borders between countries or continents, between disciplines or concepts of mind, as well as between generations or societies. Presented with an opportunity to develop their own vision, researchers who fit this profile contribute towards broadening the horizons of their respective disciplines and sharpening the profile of their university.

The Foundation also attaches great importance to fostering research in and on foreign countries, focusing on cooperation in symmetric partnerships.

Capital and Funds

Today the Foundation’s assets amount to 2.9 billion euros. The funds are generated from these assets, mainly benefitting the “General Funding” of the Foundation. In addition, funds stem from the dividends earned from Volkswagen AG shares held by the state of Lower Saxony with the Foundation as beneficiary (funding category “Niedersächsisches Vorab”). The funding within this context is provided in close cooperation with the state government to research institutions in Lower Saxony.

History

Following the end of World War II the ownership of the Volkswagen Corporation was unclear and claims were asserted from several sides. This situation was finally regulated by a treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Lower Saxony, which turned the automobile manufacturer into a joint stock company and fixed the establishment of an independent private research funding foundation. The proceeds from the privatization (at that time 1,074 million German marks) provided the endowment capital of the Foundation. The Foundation is neither a corporate foundation nor affiliated to the company; its decision-making bodies are autonomous and independent.

The conference “Big Data in a Transdisciplinary Perspective” was held in the auditorium of Herrenhausen Palace in spring 2015.

Rebuilt in 2012

Herrenhausen Palace is part of the Foundation’s real estate investments. The former summer residence of the Welfs houses a museum and a public congress center, in which also many science events take place.

Organization

The Foundation is governed by the Board of Trustees. The Board comprises 14 eminent persons drawn from the ranks of leaders in academia and civil society, of whom seven are appointed by the Federal Government and seven by the State of Lower Saxony. The Trustees are completely independent and governed solely by the Foundation’s Statutes. The Board usually convenes about three times a year to discuss and formulate strategy and to decide on applications. The Trustees are responsible for the annual budget and accounts, as well as publication of the Foundation’s annual report and appointment of the Secretary General. Dr. Wilhelm Krull has been Secretary General of the Foundation since 1996, and as such responsible for its management.
Currently the Volkswagen Foundation has a staff of about 95, spread over three main divisions. Division I is responsible for the research funding, the other two divisions manage the Foundation’s assets and take care of finance and administration. There are also four smaller units that directly report to the Secretary General, covering, among others, the areas legal affairs, evaluation/internal audit, events, and communication. The Foundation staff prepare the funding decisions for the Board of Trustees and execute the Board’s strategic decisions. This involves the conceptualization and implementation of funding initiatives, processing applications, informing and advising the applicants, and monitoring the funded projects from start to finish.

Investment

The “Investment Management Division” takes care of the Foundation’s capital assets, currently 2.9 billion euros. Their task pursues two main objectives: One is to ensure that funding for research on a continuous basis, the other is to maintain the real value of the Foundation’s capital in the face of inflationary pressure. This calls for investment not only in interest-bearing securities, but also in stocks, real estate, and alternative investments. The investment strategy is based on the portfolio theory of risk diversification.

Finance and Administration

Administering the Foundation’s finances and budgeting is a task for professional management. This is provided by the “Finance and Administration Division” which among other things takes care of the Foundation’s accounting and financial controlling. In accordance with requirements laid down in the Foundation’s Statutes, this group also prepares the annual financial statements for the Foundation’s auditors and ensures the ongoing internal control of assets. The unit “Human Resources and Corporate Services” is involved in the planning and implementation of everything necessary for efficient staffing and supports the management in all matters regarding the Foundation’s employees and recruitment. It also maintains the infrastructure necessary to ensure the smooth running of the office. The “IT-Department” is responsible for the coordination and development of the Foundation’s information and communication systems.

Core Principles

The Foundation’s support is available to the whole spectrum of academic disciplines, ranging from the humanities and social sciences, through the engineering and natural sciences, up to the bio-sciences and medicine. Funding is allocated to cover personnel costs for both academic as well as non-academic staff, for equipment and running costs. The Foundation is completely free to decide how its funds are to be allocated, which projects it considers worthy of funding, and whom it deems appropriate to grant funds to. The sole restriction is that this be in accordance with the Foundation’s Statutes which require all funding to be made to academic institutions and designated for a specific purpose. In general, all applications undergo scientific peer review.

Funding Concept

Overriding features of the Foundation’s funding concept include the preference given to new and promising fields of research, interdisciplinary approaches, support for outstanding and especially young researchers, boosts for international cooperation, a close interrelation between research, education and training, as well as enhancement of communication among researchers and between the scientific community and the public. The Foundation strives to be an active partner and to generate targeted impulses for the benefit of the national and international research communities. In pursuit of this goal it concentrates its support on specific, carefully selected funding initiatives and calls. The scope of funding is not oriented solely to the needs articulated by the scientific community. The Foundation’s focus of attention is also on current developments and issues where the economy, politics, and society look to science and scholarship to provide adequate suggestions for solutions.

Funding Profile

The Foundation’s funding profile is reflected in the structure of its portfolio which comprises three main categories: Persons and Structures, Challenges for Academia and Society, and International Focus. In addition, grants are also available for extraordinary projects (Off the Beaten Track), for communicating science and research, and in the regionally oriented area “Niedersächsisches Vorab” (Priority for Lower Saxony).

- Persons and Structures
- Challenges for Academia and Society
- International Focus

Funding initiatives and calls:

- Lichtenberg Professorships
- ’Freigeist’ Fellowships
- University of the Future
- Research in Museums
- Opus magnum
- Arts and Science in Motion (call)
• Challenges for Academia and Society
In this funding category, the Foundation aims to provide incentives for research into new fields – including areas which may well harbor potential risk – and to stimulate investigations which transcend the existing borders – either those between science and the practice, between different disciplinary cultures, or between the conventions of research in Germany and other countries.

The Foundation endeavors to stimulate research on issues for which policy makers, the economy, and the public at large look to science to provide orientation and scientifically founded concepts for shaping the future of society and for coping with current problems. Topics and issues are developed in close cooperation with academia.

Funding initiatives and calls:
- Experiment! – In Search of Bold Research Ideas
- Life? – A Fresh Scientific Approach to the Basic Principles of Life
- “Original – isn’t it?” – New Options for the Humanities and Cultural Studies
- “Mixed Methods” in the Humanities (call)
- Integration of Molecular Components into Functional Macroscopic Systems
- Symposia and Summer Schools

• International Focus
The Volkswagen Foundation has a strong tradition in facilitating the internationalization of research in Germany and supporting effective collaborations between researchers from different countries and continents. Particular attention is paid to enabling foreign scientists and scholars, especially those from less developed regions of the world, to participate in internationally competitive research projects on an equal footing. In addition, the Foundation aims at inspiring academic interest in current and future global challenges that require a global perspective and new transnational as well as transdisciplinary approaches.

Funding initiatives and calls:
- Europe and Global Challenges
- Knowledge for Tomorrow – Cooperative Research Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Between Europe and the Orient – A Focus on Research and Higher Education in/on Central Asia and the Caucasus
- Post-doctoral Fellowships in the Humanities at Universities and Research Institutes in the U.S. and Germany
- International Research in Computational Social Sciences (call)
- Trilateral Partnerships – Cooperation Projects between Scholars and Scientists from Ukraine, Russia and Germany (call)
- Cooperative Research Projects on the Arab Region (call)

Also within the scope of most other initiatives, the Foundation accepts proposals from applicants based abroad, subject to the condition that the responsibility for a substantial part of the cooperation rests with a German partner institution.

Off the Beaten Track
The Foundation also provides support for exceptional projects which lie outside the scope of its current funding portfolio. This offer is open only to truly exceptional projects. Applicants are advised in every case to first contact the program director of the respective subject area.

Communicating Science and Research
There is a pressing need to inform the public at large about the findings of research and to elucidate the working conditions of science. Therefore, the Foundation conceived the funding scheme “Communicating Science and Research” providing support for grantees in all initiatives for public relations activities, translations, and self-organized events. At times, there are also specific calls open to all applicants as was the case in 2015 referring to “Science and Data Driven Journalism”. In addition, the Foundation offers the opportunity to initiate international scientific meetings in the framework of its “Herrenhausen Conferences”. Scholars and scientists of all disciplines are invited to submit outline proposals addressing topics that are characterized by societal relevance and large potential for innovation. Depending on the respective topic, representatives of other scientific organizations, NGOs, and journalists, as well as personalities from the fields of politics, the economy, the arts, and culture should be involved.

Review and Decision
The Volkswagen Foundation is committed to the principles of peer review. Depending on the respective funding initiative or call and the accordant review procedure, the Foundation may request a number of experts to submit their written assessments of individual applications. Another procedure involves peer review by a panel of experts. In this case, all the applications submitted within the scope of a funding offer are subjected to a comparative review process.

There is no permanent body of experts, rather they are selected from various disciplines, universities and institutes – also from the non-university sector and from abroad – in accordance with the requirements of the individual applications and funding initiatives. About 450 German consultants and 280 from abroad contributed their expertise to the peer review process in 2015.

Once an application has been approved by the Board of Trustees or the Secretary General, the allocated funds have been expended.

Dr. Patricia Kannegiesser – along with eight other young academics who took part in the 2015 call – receiving her certificate of appointment as a Freigeist Fellow of the Foundation from the Secretary General, Dr. Wilhelm Kuhl. The theoretically open scheme supports persons who strive to act as catalysts in overcoming existing disciplinary, institutional, and even national boundaries.

In the jungle of Java, psychologist Professor Katja Liebal (left) and colleagues from various disciplines are investigating the role feelings play in research work. They are analyzing the emotions that arise while doing field work on the great apes, for example, and how these – hitherto hidden – feelings impact on the implementation and results of research projects.
Global Challenges – Mutual Benefits

The worldwide support for international cooperation and exchange provided by the Foundation stems from an awareness of the tremendous mutual benefits that can be gained from facing and working with different views and approaches. The will to foster communication and understanding across cultures is the basis and a central element of the Foundation’s international commitment. From its very beginnings, while post-war Germany was still under reconstruction, the Volkswagen Foundation made use of the freedom guaranteed by its statutes to also provide funding for academic institutions and research projects abroad.

Today, in light of the challenges associated with rapidly evolving political and economic structures across the globe, the ability to move beyond one’s own horizon and to collaborate successfully across borders has become increasingly important. Therefore, the Foundation strives to support effective research collaborations between researchers from different countries and continents. On the one hand, the objective is to facilitate a stronger international outlook of scholars based in Germany and to inspire academic interest in future global challenges that require new transnational and interdisciplinary approaches. On the other hand, it is to enable foreign researchers, particularly those from less developed regions of the world, to participate in internationally competitive research projects on equal footing. Achieving these objectives requires a vital contribution to sustainable capacity development, which is offered in the form of training programs, fellowships, and funding for cooperative projects as well as by establishing and securing attractive career prospects for young researchers in their home countries. In recent years, the Foundation has spent almost one third of its general funding allocations on projects in the funding schemes of its “International Focus”.

Research in Global Perspective

The funding initiative “Europe and Global Challenges” was developed in cooperation with several European partner foundations: Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, Stockholm, Compagnia di San Paolo, Turin, and the Wellcome Trust, London. This initiative mainly addresses social scientists researching complex issues linked to the process of globalization. This is to be done in large-scale collaborative projects, involving colleagues across Europe and the entire world. It is expected that the growing international integration of science will lead to new insights into the current and future role to be played by Europe, and will, in turn, produce additional stimuli for future research.

Beyond the framework of this scheme, the Foundation organized several conferences on topics relevant to research in global perspective. The events were held at Hanover’s Herrenhausen Palace and offered a platform of exchange between experts from different parts of the world. Examples include “Europe in a Non-European World” (2013), “Re-Thinking Social Inequality” (2014), “China in the Global Academic Landscapes” (2014), and “Sustainable Development Goals and the Role of Research: A Focus on Coastal Regions” (2015).

Regional Engagement

Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and the Caucasus have been regional foci of the Foundation’s international funding for the past 15 years. The initiative “Between Europe and the Orient” was introduced in 2000 with a twofold objective: on the one hand, it aimed to stimulate interest within the German academic community to conduct research into Central Asia and the Caucasus; on the other hand, it was to provide active support for research and higher education in the region. Having provided widespread support for cooperative projects in (and on) the region, the funding initiative was redesigned in 2013 and has since focused on thematic calls addressing “Environment, Natural Resources, and Renewable Energies” (2013/14) as well as “State, Economy, Law” (2014/15). In future, the initiative remains open for structurally oriented measures aiming at further training of young researchers, the reintegration of scientists and scholars who wish to return to their home countries, or the expansion of academic infrastructure in the target region.

With its second large regionally focused funding initiative “Knowledge for Tomorrow – Cooperative Research Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa”, the Foundation seeks to provide career opportunities for young researchers based on the African continent. Therefore, the Foundation has pursued a three-stage career model that enables young African academics to work at home institutions in the long term. Having started with opportunities to complete Ph.D. degrees as part of cooperative research projects, the Foundation currently funds postdoctoral fellowships. Recent calls concentrate specifically on the social sciences, the humanities, and livelihood management, following previous allocations of funding in the engineering sciences and for thematic areas such as “Natural Resources" and “Neglected Tropical Diseases and Related Public Health Research”. If junior postdocs have successfully conducted their projects, they...
can then continue as senior postdocs in the subsequent third phase of this program.

Another firmly established funding initiative with a regional focus is the program “Postdoctoral Fellowships in the Humanities at Universities and Research Institutes in the U.S. and Germany”, which aims at strengthening transatlantic research relations in the humanities. Initially established to offer stays to German fellows at Harvard University, the program has been extended to include a number of other renowned institutions in the USA. In 2012, a reciprocal dimension was added with the financial support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has since allowed American postdocs to embark on a one-year research stay in Germany.

In light of the events in North African and Arab countries that started in 2011, the Foundation has complemented its long-term regional engagement. It speedily initiated a call for research projects to accompany the ongoing political developments in the region. Subsequently, two more calls for multilateral-cooperative research projects on the Arab World were issued, one concentrating on “State, Society, and Economy in Change” (2013), the other one on “Experience of Violence, Trauma Relief, and Commemorative Culture” (2015).

Against the background of the current conflict between Ukraine, Russia, and the EU, the one-off call “Trilateral Partnerships – Cooperation Projects between Scholars and Scientists from Ukraine, Russia and Germany”, published in December 2014, was intended to strengthen cross-border cooperation between scholars, scientists, and academic institutions from all three countries. Thereby, the Foundation aimed to contribute to building rapprochement, confidence, and understanding in the region and to maintain a dialogue with colleagues in Germany. The call was open to researchers from all disciplines, i.e. natural, life and engineering sciences as well as the humanities and social sciences.

Opening up Research in Germany and Harvesting International Knowledge

In recent years, what has come to be termed the “digitalization” of society has led to fundamental social, political, and economic changes. The “digital revolution” has also had significant effects on social research, as the development and usage of new media devices and technologies has generated an abundance of data about human behavior. On the one hand, this opens up new opportunities for social science research; on the other hand, it also involves methodological and methodical challenges. These new developments offer an extensive breadth of potential research questions within the thematic field of the “Computational Social Sciences”, the exploration of which the Foundation encourages with its call in this area. Elsewhere, such as in the US, the UK, and parts of Asia, the field of Computational Social Sciences has already been established in academia, and social phenomena have been explored using computational approaches. In Germany, by comparison, this area has received less attention and is somewhat less developed. Against this backdrop, the Foundation intends to support the further advancement of this field in Germany, among other things by supporting the development of international networks. In addition, it promotes and finances the further training of junior researchers – from the level of master’s to postdoc.

Thriving for Cooperation in Symmetric Partnerships

The Foundation considers the idea of cooperation amongst equals – or in “symmetric partnership” – to be the guiding principle of all projects involving an international collaboration. Research conducted in transboundary and intercultural settings with partners from developing countries requires equitable cooperation. By defining thematic issues and designing the instrumental framework of its international grantmaking in an interactive process involving the respective communities, the Foundation has pursued this goal right from the start. This very much aligns itself with the KFPE Principles for Research in Partnership (www.kfpe.ch/s-Principles), which the Foundation recommends to adopt.

International Collaborations among Foundations

When pursuing objectives on an international scale, collaborating with other funders is of utmost importance. Therefore, the Foundation strives to strengthen existing partnerships and to develop new ones to leverage synergies and join forces, learn from each other, and – last, not least – ensure a significantly higher sustainabili-
ty of funding. Examples of existing partnerships are the European Foundation Initiative for African Research into Neglected Tropical Diseases and the funding initiative “Europe and Global Challenges”, which is run jointly with several European foundations.

Information and Contact

Applicants should first obtain updates on the Foundation’s funding portfolio before submitting proposals. For each funding initiative, the “Information for Applicants” provides detailed information on the respective scheme, its objectives, and the pertinent requirements.

Please visit our website under www.volkswagenstiftung.de. If you have any questions after reading the “Information for Applicants”, the program director responsible for the particular funding initiative will be glad to assist.
Examples of FUNDING

Semi-nomadic herders in Kyrgyzstan are confronted with increasingly hard conditions.
Towards a Safer, Sustainable Future on Pasture Lands

Cooperating with colleagues in Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, German researchers are investigating the effects of natural hazards and how to mitigate the consequences for herders.

For the first time in living memory, Mongolia experienced three consecutive dzuds during the winters of 1999, 2000, and 2001, resulting in high livestock losses for nomadic households. The economic and social consequences of these specific snow and cold catastrophes were so severe that the UN issued an international appeal for help.

Dzuds are a frequent occurrence in Mongolia. They result from dry summers with low yields of hay, and extremely cold winters with heavy snowfall so that the animals starve to death or are killed by frost.

Over the past fifteen years Central Asia has been increasingly affected by extreme weather conditions: Long cold winters follow hot summers. The conditions for animal husbandry are becoming more and more difficult. For the animals – herds of goats, sheep, cattle, horses, and camels – there is sometimes insufficient grazing, sometimes not enough water. How do herder households cope with the shocks triggered by such climatic factors that threaten their livelihoods?

This is the pivotal question posed by the interdisciplinary and international team of researchers working on a project supported in the Foundation’s funding initiative “Between Europe and the Orient – A Focus on Research and Higher Education in/on Central Asia and the Caucasus.” Under the project title “Herders Coping with Hazards in Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia: A New Research Approach Based on GPS-tracking” researchers from Germany, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia are joining to build academic bridges between Europe and Asia, and between disciplines that normally rarely converge.
The semi-nomadic herders in Kyrgyzstan are also confronted by increasingly tough conditions: In the mountainous regions, shrinking glaciers are causing herders to experience floods in winter and droughts in summer. Other extreme weather events, landslides, avalanches, and broken infrastructure are continually reducing the rangeland available for their animals, which results in the overgrazing and degradation of pastures around settlements. In these respects the herders are faced with similar conditions as in Mongolia, although the causes are somewhat dissimilar.

The research project addresses quite different aspects: On the one hand, by shedding light on the ramifications of climate change for developing and transformation economies the project team is focusing on one of the most major issues affecting all of mankind. On the other hand, they are investigating the concrete consequences of weather shocks for individual Central Asian households. For many, the loss of their livelihoods leads to migration from the steppe to the slum belts surrounding major cities.

To come back to Mongolia: “In recent years, natural disasters happened very often, people died, and many herders lost most or all of their livestock. In the past 20 years, more than 100,000 herders became refugees as result of natural disasters and moved from rural areas to urban areas”, says Dr. Myagmartseren Purevtseren, a project partner from the National University of Mongolia (NUM). The result: 50 percent of the total population of Mongolia lives in the capital Ulaanbaatar, which now has as many inhabitants as Hamburg or Munich. More than half of them, though, are living in yurts around the outskirts of the city – without running water, electricity, or sanitation. Having lost their source of income they are completely impoverished – with all the attending consequences that slim living brings with it. This is one of the scenarios that project leader Dr. Kati Krähnert from the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) wants to focus on. She wants to analyze precisely under what circumstances the nomadic people in Central Asia are forced to abandon their traditional way of life in the wake of weather shocks.

“Animal husbandry accounts for less than 15 percent of the country’s GDP”, says Kati Krähnert, “a closer look, though, reveals that the majority of Mongolians depend on it in one way or another”. Because of the extreme continental climate, farming as we know it is limited and the people have to depend more or less exclusively on livestock breeding as their source of sustenance. This phenomenon is not restricted to Central Asia, but it serves as an illustrative example for other regions like the Sahel. Taken to its logical conclusion, “in the long term, of course, climate induced migration is likely to affect us in Europe, too”, says the economist.

Based on what they will learn over the next three years by pooling their respective expertise – from the fields of geoinformatics, development economics, spatial statistics, and geography – the researchers will be making a contribution towards preventing migration to urban centers and helping the herders maintain their traditional way of life. Kyrgyz partner Dr. Akylbek Chymyrov, Head of Department “Geodesy and Geoinformatics” at the Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transport, and Architecture (KSUCTA) emphasizes: “I hope the project findings will contribute significantly to understanding how pasture management, natural hazards, and climate change affect the livestock industry.”

One point of departure for the present project is the cooperation between Kati Krähnert and her Mongolian colleagues that has been functioning smoothly for some time now: “Over the past

Livestock owners Damira Soodanbekova (left) and Kalbai Abdus (right) are being interviewed by the researchers in front of a summer shelter. Kurut balls made from dried yoghurt are prepared on the porch.

The herders offer Kumis, fermented mares’ milk, and accommodation in a yurt or wagon to drivers and tourists. Below: Project coordinator Dr. Kathi Krähnert (left) and her team at DIW in Berlin (Dr. Johannes Rieckmann, Martina Kraus and Kerstin Ringelhan) are supporting the survey design.

Addilet Bekturov, Ph.D. student, Dr. Ulanbek Shekerbekov, and project manager Prof. Dr. Akylbek Chymyrov (all from KSUCTA) check survey maps and discuss the questionnaire with Shamsia Ibragimova, director of “Soceconic”, a center for socio-economic studies.
In the surveys form the basis for research also in the current cooperation project. The findings clearly show that the migration routes and rangelands have been passed down within the family through the generations. The herders must have access to rivers or other sources of water, and the pasture quality varies, as do the locations where they erect their yurts. Good grass and sheltered campgrounds are valued highly – at least, so the researchers believe. They do not yet know precisely how crucial the individual factors might be. Nor do they know why some families move the location of their yurts up to 25 times a year, simply to put them up again quite nearby, while other families do so more seldom, although they then move greater distances. Is their behavior perhaps connected with some form of inheritance rights? Does experience and local knowledge play the decisive role? Or is maybe a higher appetite for risk the main factor?

Here you can appreciate the fine line the researchers have to tread. "It’s extremely difficult for us to find out how, when, and over which distance a nomad household moves. This is because our questions harbor European concepts of what is movement", explains Professor Dr. Edzer Pebesma, who leads the “Spatio-Temporal Modelling Lab” at the University of Münster’s Institute for Geoinformatics. “We express movement and distances in miles, time in hours and days. Nomads think of distances in other terms, as well as the time it takes to cover them, and the periods they stay somewhere. They therefore apply other criteria when developing strategies against the threat of weather shocks”.

The project partners in Münster are experts on conceptions of movement in space. They want to overcome the aforementioned cultural hurdles with the aid of GPS technology. The plan: The yurts of each of the 800 households taking part in the surveys in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan are equipped with GPS loggers. On the one hand, this amounts to a socio-cultural challenge. Will the researchers be able to explain to the herders in question what modern GPS technology is, and why they want to use it? On the other hand, it presents a technical challenge. This is the first time they are carrying out such a long-term monitoring exercise over large distances in complex landscapes.

The data will be collected over 12 months and help the team answer a number of quite different questions: How often do the households change their location? How far do they travel all told? How do they find their way through the rugged landscape? Both countries are characterized by mountain ranges, with high steppes, alpine meadows and pastures. A highly complex landscape structure determines the nomads’ travel routes and where they are able to stay. This is where the expertise of the project partners from Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan comes into its own: Myagmartseren Purevtseren from NUM is a geographer, and Akylbek Chymyrov from KSUCTA is a cartographer. Both are specialists for satellite data – and their countries’ land rights.

“The combination of different expert knowledge is one of the things that makes the project stand out”, says Kati Krähnert. “In our methodology we may be more sophisticated than our colleagues in Asia, but they have the superior expertise when it comes to knowledge of the complex land rights. This allows us to formulate the right questions for the surveys. Together, we are confident that by bridging the borders between cultures, technologies, and people we will be able to make a tangible contribution towards sustainable development in Asia”.

Jo Schilling
**500 Years of Periphery Is Enough**

The world needs emerging powers like Brazil to contribute new ideas to deal with global challenges – like implementing the responsibility to protect populations from genocide and other mass atrocities.

When Oliver Stuenkel opens the window of his office in the Avenida Paulista he lets in the pulsating roar of one of São Paulo’s main traffic arteries. The Fundação Getúlio Vargas, the private university where the 34-year-old political scientist is Assistant Professor for International Relations and coordinator of the School of History and Social Sciences, is located in the heart of the finance and business center of the Brazilian city with its twelve million inhabitants. São Paulo is one of the most important industrial agglomerations in South America. Altogether, with a couple of brief interruptions Stuenkel has spent nine years in Brazil. With a smile he says, “By now I know my way around here almost better than in Germany. After such a long time I have a good idea about what makes the Brazilians tick”.

Over the past few years, Stuenkel has been an informed observer of how Brazil has become a factor to reckon with in foreign policy, joining the big players of the northern hemisphere. His expertise is reflected in a recently completed project within the context of the funding initiative “Europe and Global Challenges.”

The political scientist, who is also a non-resident fellow with the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin where the overall project was anchored, goes on to explain: “Until former president Luiz Inácio da Silva came into power, Brazil didn’t play much of a role in active foreign policy – that is, showing an interest in resolving international conflicts and issues beyond economics and trade relations.” Therefore, Brazilian universities need experts on International Relations like Stuenkel, who speaks nine languages and received his academic training in Spain, the USA and Germany, to build up what is still a relatively young field.

The project “Global Norm Evolution and the Responsibility to Protect” analyzed how so-called “rising” and “established” powers – Brazil, China, India, South Africa, Europe and the US – engaged with the Responsibility to Protect since its establishment in 2005. “It was interesting in this respect to determine the main driving forces behind different interpretations of the Responsibility to Protect in the countries investigated, and to identity the various coalitions that emerged to promote the norm on the global level,” explains Thorsten Benner, director of GPPi, who served as one of the project coordinators.

The core of the empirical project comprised almost 400 in-depth interviews with politicians and diplomats, inquiring into the different opinions, attitudes, and visions for the future voiced in the various countries concerned. The initial results have already appeared, with further publications to follow.

The Volkswagen Foundation supported the project within the context of the funding initiative “Europe and Global Challenges.” This program brings together researchers in the humanities and social sciences in Europe and Germany with partners in emerging countries. The idea is to explore – ideally in multinational teams such as the one coordinated by GPPi – suitable concepts for tackling international conflicts and global challenges like climate change and food security. Building the various perspectives on these issues gives a multifaceted picture and reveals new approaches towards resolving the problems: Multiplicity acting as the catalyst for innovative solutions.

“A problem encountered in research projects dealing with such a complex topic is that the European actors often believe their views are crucial. They tend only to make use of the specific knowledge of their colleagues in the emerging economies and developing countries, and not to involve them in the research process on an equal footing”, says Dr. Wolfgang Levermann, programm director at the Volkswagen Foundation. Overcoming such post-colonial attitudes is one of the aims of the funding initiative. Another major objective pursued by the Foundation is, “that the researchers involved reach beyond the academic realm and produce policy papers that address stakeholders.” It goes without saying that another result should be the creation of stable international networks with a view to assisting future projects and benefiting young researchers. With this particular end in mind, project workshops involving every participant, both junior and senior, were held in Berlin, Frankfurt, Oxford and Budapest.
Oliver Stuenkel and Matias Spektor turned out to be the ideal choice to lead the Brazilian leg of the project, which also involved a doctoral student, and two research assistants. Here, it should be pointed out that apart from teaching subjects like the social sciences, history, and law, the Fundação Getúlio Vargas also enjoys a reputation as a think tank. Stuenkel and his colleagues are therefore extremely well networked, knowing personally and acting as advisors to a number of Brazilian politicians, diplomats, and NGO decision makers on matters concerning international relations. Top Brazilian politicians and officials (including the foreign minister) are frequent visitors to the university. Naturally, the students benefit greatly from such proximity to the practice. “Over the past few years the number of students enrolling for international relations has risen considerably”, says Stuenkel. He sees this as additional indication of a changing awareness for Brazil’s place in the international order, not only on the part of politics, but also in society as a whole.

A couple of years ago Stuenkel belonged to the Brazilian delegation that put finishing touches to preparations for the fourth and fifth meetings of the BRICS countries. He thinks that Brazil is a particularly good example of an up and coming country that wants to play a greater role in shaping foreign policy. Due to its own colonial history, the multiculturality brought about by immigrants from all parts of the world, and not least as result of its position as the world’s seventh biggest economy, Brazil has diverse links to other continents. Brazil could use this to its advantage in the international arena.

Stuenkel gives some examples: “Largely unnoticed by the general public, Brazil also mediated in the nuclear debate with Iran. This came about because of the stable relations it had for decades maintained with Iran.” Brazil’s foreign policy role was somewhat more prominent during the Arab spring. Under the presidency of Dilma Rousseff – in 2011 as member of the United Nations Security Council – Brazil as well as Germany abstained from voting for the motion to take military action against Libya. A short while later, the president addressed the UN General Assembly, saying: “A lot is said about responsibility to protect, but we hear precious little about responsibility while protecting. These are concepts we must develop together.” She was not merely paying lip-service to the matter at hand. Shortly afterwards, Brazil submitted to the UN Security Council a concept proposal developed by diplomats and foreign policy actors bearing the title “Responsibility While Protecting: Elements for the Development and Promotion of a Concept”. The RWP paper caused quite a stir – and considerable annoyance, for up to that occasion such initiatives and position papers had been the undisputed prerogative of the Western powers.

According to the RWP concept paper: “There is a growing awareness that the concept of responsibility for protection could be misused for purposes other than the protection of civilian populations, in the same way that regime change could be misused. In view of this, it becomes more difficult to attain the protection goals pursued by the international community”, a reference to Libya, which could apply equally well to the crisis-torn region of Syria. Among other things, Brazil pleaded to refrain from military intervention, and proposed that the Security Council should contemplate an improved procedure for monitoring the interpretation and execution of mandates. However, clearly unnerved by the ensuing protest, Brazil has made no attempt to pursue further development of the RWP paper. The deep economic and political crisis of the recent past has not helped either. Still, it is clear that “Brazil is no longer prepared to remain on the sidelines”, summarizes Oliver Stuenkel.

At the end of the 1990s, the Brazilian social scientist Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães published a book titled “500 Years of Periphery” outlining the political positioning of his country. If left up to the current government and its academic advisors, though, this state of affairs will very soon be over.

Mareike Knoke

For further information on project results please visit: www.volkswagenstiftung.de/ch/globalnorm
An Insoluble Dilemma?
On their way towards a modest level of affluence, countries of the global South are producing growing amounts of greenhouse gases. Politics, industry, and science have to tackle a number of major tasks.

In Germany, the mention of climate mitigation immediately calls to mind technology like solar cells or wind farms. Of course it is not a bad thing when industrial nations make increasing use of renewable energies. At the global level, though, the fixation on technical solutions to the problem falls short. According to Prof. Dr. Jann Lay, leader of the research project started in 2013 and an economist at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies in Hamburg, “The debate is void of a development perspective”. He therefore finds it gratifying that other researchers from emerging economies are given the opportunity to bring their expertise into the project.

In the world’s emerging economies, millions of people are desperately striving to work their way out of poverty. The ensuing economic growth in these countries, though, leads to increasing emissions of greenhouse gases. Whether or not these emissions can be damped will be crucial to the success of global climate change mitigation in the 21st century. Therefore, the cardinal question is: Can climate change mitigation go hand in hand with the fight against poverty and made to become a win-win situation? Many experts believe that climate change mitigation can be achieved more cost-efficiently in emerging economies than in the industrial nations.
Wouldn’t that put a damper on economic growth, though? Working in cooperation with a team including international economists and political scientists, Lay is seeking to find answers to questions like these.

According to Rennkamp, there is currently a public debate in South Africa surrounding several variants of a proposed carbon tax. Maybe this could really develop into a win-win situation. For instance, if the tax revenues were not simply to disappear into the public coffers but were instead used to subsidize the electricity bills of poor households. “Nothing has been decided yet, though,” says our political scientist.

In another of the countries in the focus of CliMiP, progress has been faster. Mexico introduced a carbon tax in 2014. This, however, met with fierce opposition from trade associations and representatives of the cement and steel industries and the mining sector, all of whom feared loss of earnings as a result of the new tax. Therefore, according to the Mexican project partner, the law has remained something of a toothless tiger.

The aim of CliMiP is to shift the focus from narrow definitions of climate change mitigation policy to encompass the economic consequences. For instance, the researchers carry out opinion surveys to find out how consumers would react to price increases caused by measures of climate change mitigation. They then go on to examine how different consumer groups would be affected. For example, rich and poor sections of the population. The researchers selected Mexico, South Africa, and Thailand for their study because these countries are undergoing particularly rapid economic development.

At the same time, their emissions of greenhouse gases are soaring. “Studies on this topic tend to focus on China or India, completely overlooking other countries in similar stages of development – we want to complete the story,” says Lay. The project group also extended their analysis to include a case study based on Indonesia. The aim of this was to shed light on the social consequences of removing subsidies on fossil fuels. Lay reports that initial research findings show an increase in the price of liquefied gas would cause difficulty to poorer members of the population. Fishermen and the owners of traditional hot-food stalls would be particularly hard hit.

In Thailand the project focuses on the political factors in detail and the consequences of climate change mitigation for poorer sectors of the economy. In general, climate governance is less prioritized. Both an impediment to and an evidence of the rather passive attitude is the delay in enactment of the Thailand National Master Plan on Climate Change, having been prepared and revised several times since 2007 and not in...
Spotlight on PROJECTS

Wongsa has experience of cooperation with Asian colleagues – from Japan, for instance – in earlier projects. This is the first time, though, that she has worked with experts from other parts of the world; in this case from Mexico and South Africa. She finds these new perspectives rewarding, not only regarding the novel research methods she got to know. She appreciates the comparative aspect: “The cultural, social, and political contexts are different, and this is reflected in the different aspects of political decision-making processes.”

The CliMiP project is an excellent example of the global approach and the networked research fostered by the Foundation’s funding initiative “Europe and Global Challenges”. The specific research focus and the respective societal challenges require a cross-border approach. The main contribution of the European experts working in the project is to explore how Europe can have a share in resolving the problems of the countries involved. Jann Lay sums up: “Three aspects are crucial to the success of climate change mitigation, and these therefore also form the focus of CliMiP: First, negotiations on climate change mitigation on the global level; second, climate policy on the national level; and third, the specific technical and economic implementation. We expect the final project results will influence the global debate on climate change mitigation, development, and justice – as well as the shape of political solutions.”

Sven Titz

Research Associate
Kridtiyaporn Wongsa
(left) is a member
of the team around
Prof. Dr. Mingsarn
Kansa – and (right),
Director of PPSI at
Chiang Mai University’s
Faculty of Economics,
who also supervises
her contribution to the
CliMiP project. The two
other Thai participants,
Professor Anan
Wattanakuljarus and
Ph.D. student Supawan
Saelim, are based
at Bangkok.

Similar to South Africa, Thailand has to face the challenge of securing its supply of energy. In 2014 it had to import 85.19 percent of the crude oil needed. In attempt to shift to cleaner energy, Thailand increases its dependence on domestic natural gas. But at the current rate of production it is estimated that these natural gas reserves will last only six years counting from 2014. There is a need for new sources of clean renewable energy. Wongsa is investigating how small community projects contribute to the desired win-win solution regarding energy security, climate mitigation, and most importantly poverty reduction. She interviews villagers about their experiences with small hydropower plants and local waste-to-energy management. The results are documented and analyzed to assess the prospects and the impact of such projects. The young researcher also examines the agricultural sector: She talks to farmers about the option of organic farming to reduce the use of fertilizers, a source of a greenhouse gas. And she asks, for example, how they manage their biomass – in order to see if they might be able to utilize it for biogas production or as natural fertilizers.

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Sven Titz

For further information on the project please visit:
• www.volkswagenstiftung.de/ch/climatechange

At the German Institute of Global and Area Studies in Hamburg Prof. Dr. Jann Lay, research fellow Sebastian Renner, and Dr. Miriam Prys (from left) play their part in making the globally spread project a success.

action yet. According to Kridtiyaporn Wongsa, the cooperation partner working at the Public Policy Studies Institute in Chiang Mai, the delay can be traced partly to the institutional structure in the Thai climate governance. The key actor, the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), is the national focal climate point and as such responsible for preparing the plan. “The bureaucratic procedures there can be very complex and complicated, to the extent that it impedes the completion of the plan”, says Wongsa. That may not have been the case if rather more dynamic agencies in the field, the Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organization and the Ministry for Energy had shared the direct responsibility over national climate policy and planning. That, at least, is one conclusion drawn from the first analysis of the political networks by the CliMiP researchers. Wongsa and her colleagues want to find out more about how decisions relevant for climate change mitigation come about, and the shortcomings inherent to such processes.
A Network for Health

The African Research Network on Neglected Tropical Diseases ARNTD focuses on creating a sustainable environment for urgently needed research.

Filariasis, a parasitic disease where worms get under the skin, joint pains and swelling of the lymph nodes resulting from trypanosomiasis, the sleeping sickness; severe damage to internal organs caused by schistosomiasis – frightening tropical diseases affect mainly the poorest of the poor all over the world. The Ghanaian health researcher Dr. John Amuasi knows this only too well. "You just have to look around", he says, "Diseases like these are commonplace and make life difficult, especially for needy persons in Africa." Almost a billion people worldwide suffer from a neglected tropical disease (NTD) of one kind or another. Although treatment is available for some of them, in many cases there still is no hope for patients. "Because they are poor, there is no market incentive for research into better health products like drugs, diagnostics, and vaccines or better delivery mechanisms for those remedies that already exist," says Amuasi.

Already many years ago he decided to contribute towards changing the status quo. Amuasi has been actively involved in efforts to promote NTD research since he was a young medical student. He was part of the launch of the Doctors Without Borders' Drugs for Neglected Diseases Working Group, and later worked closely with the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative. As a senior research fellow at the Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research in Tropical Medicine (KCCR), in 2014 Amuasi was appointed the first executive director of the African Research Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases (ARNTD). The main focus of this network is to support evidence-based control and elimination of neglected tropical diseases from Africa by empowering current and future generations of African researchers. This includes efforts to ensure that research findings are actually implemented and that help arrives where it is needed most – the people affected by disease. Being responsible for building up the network, John Amuasi interacts with health researchers and policy makers especially in Africa and internationally, drawing from his vital connections built over the years. For example, in 2015 he was a panelist alongside the Minister of Health of the Philippines at the Council on Health Research and Development colloquium on health research fairness in London. He also met with a member of the network in the Democratic Republic of Congo where they discussed strategies to improve the involvement of francophone researchers in the network.

The building of a NTD network started with the Africa Initiative of the Volkswagen Foundation in 2005, which amongst others also focusses on tropical medicine. Working in cooperation with four European partners (Nuffield Foundation, Foundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Fondazione Merieux, Fondazione Cariplo), in 2007 the Volkswagen Foundation initiated a program called the European Foundation Initiative for African Research in Neglected Tropical Diseases (EFINTD). The central objective was to promote African researchers in different stages of their career and provide incentives for them to work at institutes within their home universities. Over the five-year course of the project, the program allocated 4.5 million euros to fund 23 postdocs and six scholarships for research stays. Towards the end of the funding period, at the request of the African researchers, the foundations developed a strategy to consolidate and expand on the successful capacity building experience.

"The African Research Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases is the result of this, and we are working hard on it", says Dr. Amuasi and sums up the main objectives: To strengthen cooperation and the exchange of ideas among African researchers, to promote young researchers by improving academic training at their home universities, and to build up sustainable structures that will enable African researchers to independently acquire third-party funding. The European Foundation Initiative for African Research into the Neglected Tropical Diseases is providing 500,000 euros up to 2019 to support John Amuasi build up the network.
Taking information on NTD research to the communities ensures their participation and confirms that their voice is heard and acted upon.

Most of the researchers currently active in ARNTD are former holders of scholarships under the EFINTD funding program. “The long-term target is to expand the circle of members to include additional African experts on NTDs, as well as policy makers, doctors, pharmacists, and other health workers”, says John Amuasi. “There has always been a wide gap between health research findings and policy making, which makes it difficult to translate important results into intervention and implementation and help those suffering.” A classic example of this difficulty was the effort in several malaria endemic countries to introduce artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT), a new medication against uncomplicated malaria that works better than the older medicines. Although ACT was officially recommended by the World Health Organization and the health ministries in several countries, it was largely ignored by doctors and patients. “The problem was that the older medicines were still available”, explains Dr. John Amuasi. “Doctors and patients alike simply continued using the medications they were accustomed to, although they were not so effective. There was a need for some intervention to remedy the situation and some political action would have been useful. – However engaging with politics is something researchers are generally not very good at.”

Beside availability, one of the success factors when introducing new medications is of course price. Dr. John Amuasi has carried out a number of studies in this area, and this was also the focus of his doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, USA, in Health Services Research, Policy and Administration. Dr. Amuasi’s experience in the global health arena has made him value the importance of winning over key actors. “It was support from the former US President’s ‘Carter Center’ which contributed to almost eliminating the guinea worm”, says Amuasi. “If we are able to achieve a high level of visibility for ARNTD it should be possible to gain many more important supporters.” Several important steps have already been taken. For example, the ARNTD representative at the Pre-G7 Summit Conference in Germany managed to present the network’s concept to an audience of high-ranking politicians, including the German Chancellor. And the former President of Ghana, John Agyekum Kufuor, who is already promoting international awareness of NTDs is being approached by the ARNTD to use his global influence to support the work of the developing network.

Dr. John Amuasi and his colleagues have drawn up an action plan with the objective of being able to have a fully viable and vibrant ARNTD by 2019. Besides nurturing relationships with sponsors and ongoing efforts to boost NTD research in Africa, they intend to develop communication channels so that scientific findings will become more readily available to all involved. This includes community briefings and information dissemination sessions as well as press releases and policy briefs, newsletters, and patient brochures.

“Our dream is that one day people will no longer have to suffer from diseases for which there is no adequate treatment. That’s a goal truly worth fighting for.”

Melanie Gärtner

For information on ARNTD please visit: arntd.org
Replacing the Yardstick and Changing Perspective

“To overcome methodological nationalism means to ensure that the determination of the space of relevance becomes part of every new research project.”

In close cooperation with international partners, Professor Ravi Ahuja from Göttingen University has initiated “A Global Network for Global History” which focuses on a southern perspective. Beate Reinhold interviewed him about this project and the importance of reaching beyond set research spaces in historical science.

Professor Ahuja, you and your colleagues successfully submitted a research proposal in the frame of “Off the Beaten Track”, a program noted for its exceptionally high aspirations. In what way do you personally think your project stands out by breaking new ground?

Ahuja: Well, research in the area of global history is in itself certainly nothing new. It has become quite a popular research field in many countries, especially in the North Atlantic region. New is the focus on the “southern world” and the project’s approach in respect of researching global-historical topics in close cooperation with partners in the Global South.

How is this reflected in the project design? How do you ensure the objectives are met?

Ahuja: The initiative was conceived in the North Atlantic region by institutes with considerable experience of research in this field – Harvard, Amsterdam, and here in Göttingen – but our network partners are located in the southern world, namely in Dakar, São Paulo, Shanghai and New Delhi. That’s what’s so special about the project – the fact that the main hubs lie outside the North Atlantic region. This means that the fellows of the program are given the opportunity to become acquainted with research approaches in other regions of the world which are highly active and generate novel perspectives.

To what extent are these cooperation partners free to leave their own mark?

Ahuja: Here, we also have a different approach. More often than not, it is the financially strong science locations of the North that decide on the research topic. Once this has been done, they then set about searching for suitable partners in the southern world who are seen fit to carry out the previously determined research program. In contrast to this, we simply stake out the overall framework. How to proceed within this general scope is then discussed together with our partners.

How far have you progressed in this so far? Have some initial topics already emerged?

Ahuja: It’s only a short while since we received confirmation of funding, we are still in the initial stages of discussion and planning our first topic workshop. As to be expected, the project participants have articulated different preferences. A large thematic field that interests everyone, though, is the history of labor. The partners in Brazil, India, Senegal, Amsterdam, as well as in Harvard and Göttingen, have already done a lot in this area. It represents a field in which global relations are very much in play. One immediately thinks of the migration flows which have grown so much since the 19th century and linked parts of the world closely together. I expect this will in one way or another find a place in our research.

To return to what makes the project exceptional – viewing things from the southern world: Why do you think this approach was neglected for such a long time?

Ahuja: Our entrenched way of thinking also left its mark on our institutions. We tend to view our world from a strongly European and North-Atlantic perspective – even though this may encompass other parts of the world, the general orientation is given. In the Anglo-Saxon world, for instance, it’s still not unusual to find university courses with the title “The west and the rest.” In Germany, the “World Wars” are generally still taught as if they had been exclusively European Wars. We’re not saying this is the first time that historiography focuses on the global. However, the old imperial history that goes back to the 19th century has left its legacy: University chairs, libraries – and, of course, lines of research are dominated by certain ways of thinking. Consider, for instance, the concept of diffusion: The notion that universal modernization processes emanating from Europe will eventually take hold with similar results in other parts of the world. Empirically unsustainable, the concept shows surprising resilience. This is reinforced by the fact that the discipline of history is still marked by a pronounced national bias today: If this holds true in university departments, things are even worse in schools.

This means that a special effort has to be made?

Ahuja: Yes, it takes a lot to even partially change such entrenched mind sets. The history of global connections has created an extremely uneven landscape since the 19th century. Certain regions of the world are deeply intertwined, whereas
others are marginalized. Divergences of historical development are not necessarily worn down in the wake of the historical process but sometimes deepened. To quote an example: The debate in economic history concerning the “great divergence” in the development of Europe and China. Of course, here we should also ask: Why does Europe, once again, serve as the yardstick and how come we don’t focus on comparing processes of other regions of the world? Why don’t we look, for instance, into twentieth-century political events held a conference on the First World War. Here, there is really scope for breaking completely new ground. We can open up new perspectives on major world events – events that we previously failed to grasp in respect of their consequences for the world as a whole. Another area that holds promise of revealing new insights is that surrounding the social movements that emerged around 1968, and then there is the economic crisis that spread around the world in the mid-seventies.

Ahuja: I’ll answer your question by quoting two examples: Two years ago the Volkswagen Foundation held a conference on the First World War from a global historical perspective, placing a stronger focus on how the war was appropriated in the southern world – this thematic area could also be of interest to our project, by the way. The conference revealed many serious consequences of the war that have received little attention in the North Atlantic region until recently. For instance, the political and economic developments in the Middle East and the accompanying food crises; the massive delegitimization of colonial rule in Asia that led to a nationalism supported by broad sections of the population, and debates in Latin America concerning the inaptitude of the European model for shaping the future of politics on the continent. Conventional world-war historiography took little note of these profound consequences of the First World War. Here, there is really scope for breaking completely new ground. We can open up new perspectives on major world events – events that we previously failed to grasp in respect of their consequences for the world as a whole.

Ahuja: Yes, but it goes farther than that. Taking a different look at things might result in revealing other spatial relations, resulting in a different relationship to the global. At the moment I still perceive a predominance of a triumphalist globalization narrative. The world is flat, space is vanishing – dissolved by new technologies – and time is all that matters now. Encompassing a southern-world perspective reveals that time-space compression unfolds in an extremely uneven way, and that we are faced with a much more fissured geography of the world than that conveyed by the conventional narrative and the media.

Is there any one thing you are particularly looking forward to: Perhaps an area where much is still unknown and where your research approach could possibly open up something really new?

Ahuja: Historiography has a tendency to develop in turns and waves. Some people say we are currently witnessing a period of global turn which results in global history becoming the adequate form of historical narrative. Personally I don’t share this view. Rather, I am of the opinion that historical research should be free to choose its own scales of reference – and these may well vary from case to case. For area studies of the world this is to say: The growing job insecurity facing a part of the working population. In the southern world the debate is dominated by another phenomenon: so-called ‘informalisation’. Informal work is the term given to labor relations not subject to social security schemes or labor law protection. The proportions vary substantially. Whereas in many European countries precarious employment relations still only affect a minority of the workforce and are perceived as an unfortunate departure from ‘normality’, in the majority of countries in the southern world informal labor relations constitute the absolute norm. In many countries of the global South, only a very small minority of people have jobs that are linked to any welfare entitlements or protected by law. This gives rise to the question: What is the history behind these two very different narratives; are they linked in some strange way? In the 1950s and 60s it would have been assumed that in Europe and America a work norm regulated by a welfare state had emerged, and that this would eventually become the norm around the whole world. Today, we not only have to realize this has not taken place, but that in our countries the growth of precarious labor relations increasingly bears at least partial similarity with the dominating form of informal work in the southern world. Thus, our previous notion of global processes has been refuted by real life. Historiography can play a role in explaining how we reached this point, contrary to all expectations.

I would like to ask you about your personal attachment to this field of research. What is the importance of global history to you?

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Interview with Ahuja: Perhaps I should explain a little further. In Europe, the development of historiography was closely linked to the development of the nation states. That was not only the case in Europe but also in post-colonial nations – although this took place in the twentieth century and against quite another background. The postcolonial historiographies in Asia and in Africa first had to free themselves of the imperial perspective. Hence, in many respects the national perspective was the result of overcoming the older dominant perspective, whereas in the European context the national perspective was the original point of departure. That has a great number of consequences. First, in the European space – as well as the American –, young historians find the turn towards global perspectives far less problematic and more liberating. It means reaching beyond a space that had been preset for a long time. In postcolonial contexts the problem is much more complex. Here, too, many historians had perceived over the past four decades the nation-centeredness of historiography to be inadequate and as such unacceptable. However, the turn towards global supranational perspectives is still burdened by the tradition of imperial history. This explains why in India and other parts of the world there was a tendency to concentrate on smaller, subnational levels. A certain naivety in respect of global history might exist in Europe, but not so much from postcolonial perspectives. This may prove beneficial and helpful in respect of developing critical global perspectives on history.

And perhaps another argument in support of purposefully allowing the global South to come to the fore and have more say ...

Ahuja: Precisely! It is not just about bringing in more empirical material and drawing on more encompassing data dossiers. It’s all about changing our perspectives. For us it is of great importance to investigate topics that also have a global dimension from a decentered perspective. In my case and that of my colleagues this means from South Asia. We are actually already doing this in several different projects. For instance, a large collaborative project funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research for an International Center for Advanced Studies (MICAS: MP) in Delhi, in which several German and Indian partners are participating. In this respect, the project supported by the Volkswagen Foundation is part of a strategic orientation.

The project will run for three years. That’s certainly a good impulse, but what about the prospects for a lasting effect?

Ahuja: In my view, the most sustainable activity you can think of is to invest in people. And that is precisely what the project is designed to do. The objective is to enable the young generation of historians at the start of their career to develop new perspectives. They will be able to explore the plurality of research perspectives in different parts of the world and encouraged to adopt similar approaches. This is a long-term investment as many of these young researchers will one day occupy university chairs. The earlier they are given an opportunity to break out of the provincial constraints that exist in every national historiography and reflect critically on their situation, the earlier this will also become an anchored sustainability at universities.

For further information on the project and researchers involved please visit:

• www.volkswagenstiftung.de/cb/globalhistory
Bio-Based Cement Solutions – Made in Africa

Young African scientists are developing innovative formulas to produce building materials with local resources. The Volkswagen Foundation is funding the KEYS symposia series in Tanzania, Ghana, and South Africa.

There was a certain amount of defiance in play when Nnesheye Msinjili chose to study engineering. “Studying engineering is generally perceived to be particularly demanding, and women therefore shouldn’t attempt it. So I made up my mind to do just that,” says the young woman from Tanzania. She now works for the Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing (BAM) in Berlin and is very happy in her work; among other things she researches new formulas for producing cement. Her colleague, Dr. Wolfram Schmidt, shares her enthusiasm for this crucial building material which is used all over the world. The two of them initiated KEYS, which stands for Knowledge Exchange for Young Scientists. The project aims at building networks to bring international experts together with young African scientists for an exchange of knowledge on cement and concrete technology. What’s so special about this three-part series is the combination of summer school features and the quality of scientific symposia: Young researchers get the opportunity to broaden their knowledge and to discuss their ideas with experienced senior scientists – in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and esteem.

The first of the three symposia was held in June 2015 in cooperation with the University of Dar es Salaam. From a total of thirty candidates, Msinjili and Schmidt had carefully selected the eighteen young African scientists who were granted a scholarship to attend the kick-off event in the Tanzanian metropolis. Also four young German researchers received funds to participate and were able to benefit from the expertise of the ten high-level specialists who came from Germany, Switzerland, the USA, Sweden, Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, and South Afri-
ca. Assembling this heterogeneous group for a week's program entailed manifold challenges which Nsesheye Msinjili managed by her proven organizational skills.

It is for good reason that such keen interest is being shown in the gray building material. The economies in Sub-Saharan Africa are booming and the demand for cement to build new roads, bridges, and buildings is rising fast. In Africa, though, the cost of producing and purchasing the sought-after material is high. “Depending on the region, an average earner has to work anything between one and ten days in order to buy a bag of cement that in Germany would only cost a couple of euros”, Schmidt explains. This is partly due to the transport costs involved. In Sub-Saharan Africa, cement works are few and far between, and the material often has to be transported over distances of several hundred miles before reaching the building site. Moreover, some of the raw materials needed for cement production have to be imported. Although it may be cheaper in the short run to import subsidized cement from China or Pakistan, for instance, this would be contrary to the need to create badly needed jobs at home and to develop more sustainable local solutions fitting in ideally with the local boundary framework and supply chains. In addition, from a more global point of view, it does not make any real sense to ship products halfway around the globe that can be produced from local resources that exist in overabundance.

The main focus of the symposium was therefore on the topic of research into new binder materials and cement compositions incorporating supplementary cementitious materials in an attempt to make the local production of cement and mortar more environmentally friendly and cost efficient. The four days were filled with lectures, presentations, discussions, and a visit to a large construction site. “The participants were highly focused all the time”, reports Schmidt. “It wasn’t unusual to find them deeply engrossed in discussion until far into the night.” The 21-year-old construction engineer Farai Shaba from Zambia was full of praise. “I think the symposium showed us all that we’re not alone and that we all have similar problems to tackle – but also that we will progress faster through cooperation.”

The symposium was closed – and Dr. Wolfram Buregyeya. Below: The young scientists and professionals carefully listened to all presentations.

Happy with the symposium Organizer Nsesheye Msinjili (left) and participants Prof. Dr. Kaisa Feron and Ph.D. fellow Apollo Buregyeya.

In addition, from a more global point of view, it does not make any real sense to ship products halfway around the globe that can be produced from local resources that exist in overabundance.

According to Schmidt, “Action is urgently needed”. He remains optimistic, though, and believes the new cement formulas will lead to important energy savings. Carbon dioxide emissions can be cut significantly by reducing the clinker content in cement, either in industrial nations through the addition of waste products from steel production or coal combustion or, as proposed by the young scientists from Africa, agricultural plant waste. Schmidt is quick to point out that, “because there isn’t so much industrial waste in Africa but a strong agricultural sector, using plant waste harbors a huge potential.”

However, a lot of research still has to be done before this potential can be realized. And here lies the nub of the problem. The academic training of budding construction engineers and chemists at most African universities fails to address some of the necessary skill-sets. “Although the students are highly focused, their studies tend to concentrate on applied science rather than research”, Schmidt has noticed. Academic teaching revolves around the classic lecture that more often than not is based on old literature. In addition to this, the professors do not enjoy the same status as in industrial nations and they are often badly paid – some having to top up their salary with jobs on the side. Under such circumstances, the area of research is the first to suffer.

As a consequence, there is already a serious lack of suitably-trained local scientists. Experts must therefore be brought in from abroad at high cost,
Spotlight on

While highly motivated graduates often choose alternative careers or have to emigrate because they can’t find a job in their branch at home, “That’s totally unbalanced”, Schmidt complains. Over the next twenty years the demand for engineers in the emerging economies of Sub-Saharan Africa is going to grow rapidly, so the problem can only get worse.

As the engaged German researcher with a wealth of experience in the organization of international congresses knows, “Another problem is that young scientists are not able to benefit fully from offers of international networking and cooperation or attend expert events through lack of financial support”. He sees this as a shortcoming of development policy. “Without question, children must learn to read and write, and also adult education is important. However, we should step up efforts to improve the education of university students. After all, those are the people who will shape the future of their countries in academia, politics, and economy. We should support them in achieving a really sustainable development and a secure independent existence”, he stresses.

Schmidt has no doubt that the young African scientists are going to make their mark. “The next generation of sustainable cement types is going to come from Africa”, he says. And because they are not so entrenched in conventions, he fully expects African engineers to come up with new ideas in other areas of construction like building design, for instance.

Having closed with a visit to the large airport construction site in Dar Es Salaam, the event as a whole delivered a motivational boost to the participants’ research efforts and further education. For example, some of them now want to enroll in online courses offered by foreign universities in combination with personal mentoring.

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Do you come across any hurdles during your work?

Freitag: In our case there were some difficulties concluding the required cooperation agreements with the partner universities. As we already knew from other colleagues, we often have to be extremely flexible. For instance, immediately following the revolution, our Egyptian colleague tried to formalize the research cooperation with Cairo University. The university management was very taken with the idea. And then – it was shortly after President Mursi’s ouster – she was informed by her university that it was no longer opportune for local academics to work with researchers in other countries. In any case, she was told, it would take several years before an agreement could be signed. In Morocco, on the other hand, not only would tax have had to be paid on the project funds, depleting them significantly, but also the university wanted to keep part of it as institutional overhead. This would have meant nothing would be left over for the local Ph.D. students. We did finally manage in both cases to conclude agreements, but had to find another solution for the young research associates via stipend contracts.

Does the fast pace of developments in these countries sometimes frustrate project proceedings?

Freitag: Here, we have to be flexible, too. For instance, during the kick-off meeting for our project in Berlin we had to confront the question whether, after the overthrow of Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood government in 2013, it would still be possible to investigate the protest camp on Cairo’s Rabaa al-Adawyia Square and carry out interviews. Was such a field study still possible, or would it endanger the young research associates in Cairo and, of course, their interlocutors? They could easily be identified as such from the interviews and subsequently put under arrest. For the same reason, we refrained from setting up a Facebook page for the project because data security – details of the participating persons – couldn’t be ensured.

That means you feel a sense of responsibility for your partners?

Freitag: But of course. We must never lose sight of the safety of the people we cooperate with. We have to take the threat of possible reprisals very seriously indeed. In many cases, the very fact that funding is received from abroad can be enough to raise suspicion. For this reason, for a long time we have made a point of discussing with our partners whether granting a German stipend might be a danger for research associates in their countries.

Do you always know the reason why your and other researchers’ efforts are sometimes thwarted?

Freitag: At least sometimes official reasons are given. I can relate an experience made in a project initiated by German and French colleagues in Saudi Arabia. An architect wanted to research traditional stone architecture in Saudi Arabian villages in cooperation with a local women’s university. The local governor of the region, however, banned a planned meeting in one of the villages because he considered the presence of young female students to be indecent – supposedly because it couldn’t be ensured that the genders would be separated during the event. Whether the ban was really due to moral considerations or would still be possible to investigate the protest camp on Cairo’s Rabaa al-Adawyia Square and carry out interviews. Whether the ban was really due to moral considerations or whether the governor was bothered by the idea that a free exchange might take place between the artists, village inhabitants, urban intellectuals, and foreign researchers expected to be present, we never found out.

Are problems like that negotiable?

Freitag: Sometimes such issues can be negotiated with local authorities, sometimes one just has to act at the spur of the moment.

What about support here in Germany: Is there sufficient funding for research on the Arab world?

Freitag: The funding that comes from the Volkswagen Foundation is something of a windfall. It takes into account the need for flexibility. I was talking about and which is so important for researchers working in the region. Of course we would like to see more initiatives of this type. It is most unlikely that state institutions would be prepared to fund a project like ours because of the frequently unstable research conditions.

In conclusion, a question about the role you play. How far do you see yourself in an advisory position?

Freitag: For my part – I’m sure I can also talk for my German project colleagues at ZMO in this respect – I do not see myself as an advisor in the countries we are researching in. We cannot, and we don’t want to intervene in local politics. The only exception might, at times, be an academic advisory function. However, I do perceive an important task in reaching as wide a public as possible. In Germany we can do this by means of scientific and other publications and lectures that challenge stereotypes and provide a differentiated picture of Arab countries and the conditions that prevail there. We of course also want to address the politicians. For it appears they often have no idea of how diverse positions and discussions are within different Arab countries. There are many facets quite surprising to outsiders, such as the existence of many well trained critical artists and intellectuals in a country such as Saudi Arabia.

For information on projects funded under this scheme please visit:

www.volkswagenstiftung.de/cb/arabregion
Water Is Life, and Clean Water Means Health

In a collaborative effort scientists from three countries are researching the correlation between water supply and the risk of disease in Uzbekistan.

In Uzbekistan researchers are facing up to the complex questions: To which extent does the population have access to adequate hygiene and sufficient supplies of clean drinking water? How can the health risks associated with water be prevented or at least diminished? “We still don’t know enough about the links or the exposure routes through which pathogens breeding in water affect human health in the region”, says Dr. Saravanan Subramanian, an expert in the fields of health systems and water management at the University of Bonn’s Center for Development Research (ZEF). Dr. Subramanian is the coordinator of a research project bearing the title “Health Research Capacity and Water-Related Diseases: Improving Risk Management Strategies for Public Healthcare in Uzbekistan [HEALTHCAP]”, which is investigating conditions in the Central Asian country.

Besides three Uzbek institutes another cooperation partner is the International Centre for Integrated Assessment and Sustainable Development at the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands. The overall aim of the collaborative project is to strengthen research on the theme in Uzbekistan and develop new strategies of risk assessment so that local health-sector actors can be trained and healthcare improved. The Volkswagen Foundation is supporting the project within the context of its Central Asia funding initiative, which has already supported some 500 projects and made over 50 million euros available for the successful cooperation between researchers in Germany and in the region. In this framework, Uzbek researchers were granted 5.6 million euros for 37 projects.

Since Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, several organizations have been active in enhancing the country’s water supplies. Like other projects, HEALTHCAP builds on existing
national health reforms and policy initiatives like the “Water Safety Plan”, which among others foresees the full development and modernization of the water and health systems by the year 2020. Dr. Subramanian points out, “HEALTHCAP stands out by its scientific and interdisciplinary approach in analyzing the complex linkage between water supply and public health”. According to his colleague, hydrologist and team leader Prof. Dr. Islam Usmanov from the Research Institute of Irrigation and Water Problems (RIIWP) at Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Mitigation “Previous measures undertaken by the authorities concentrated on stopping the spread of disease once an infection broke out. There was no attempt to investigate the impacts of climate, environmental change, or industrial and agricultural production.” Altogether, the project pools expertise from the fields of epidemiology, public health, economics, water management, geography, the social sciences, and computer science. The partners perceive their cross-border and cross-disciplinary approach as a real opportunity to analyze the complex issues in detail and develop suitable solutions.

Uzbekistan has a continental climate marked by hot, dry summers and low rainfall. The intensive cultivation of cotton and other branches of agriculture take enormous amounts of water, and the use of fertilizer and pesticides is widespread. In addition to this, Uzbekistan’s rapidly growing industry consumes almost 0.75 cubic miles of water every year, half of which is channeled back in a contaminated state – constituting a further major threat to the supply of drinking water. As a consequence of all this, in Uzbekistan water has become a scarce commodity – in combination with inadequate hygiene conditions posing threat to human health. According to the Joint Monitoring Panel of the WHO/UNICEF, only about 47 percent of the total population have access to mains water supplies. Many people, especially in rural regions, have to fetch their
In an initial work package, the HEALTHCAP team mapped the status of water supply and sanitation and the health sector infrastructure in Tashkent province. Data were gathered also regarding water quality, the health status of the population and sociocultural dimensions. In a second step they carry out a detailed survey of private households. “We chose the region of Tashkent because of its combination of rural and urban habitats with readily accessible health data including waterborne diseases”, explains Aziz Rasulov from the Research Institute of Sanitation, Hygiene and Occupational Diseases (RISHOD). With 4.45 million inhabitants, Tashkent province is the country’s third-biggest and fastest growing province, surrounding the capital of the same name in the North East of Uzbekistan. Here, over 80 percent of the population is connected to the mains water supply, and 70 percent of households are equipped with a wastewater system. Although steps are taken to improve water supply, there are still not enough wastewater treatment plants, or water distribution systems. Many of the facilities that do exist were built in the 70s of the last century and require renovation and modernization by now.

In this respect, though, there are differences over the country as a whole as well between urban and rural areas. In the province of Tashkent the HEALTHCAP team is therefore looking at urban and rural areas. In the province of Tashkent because of its combination of rural and urban habitats with readily accessible health data including waterborne diseases”, explains Aziz Rasulov from the Research Institute of Sanitation, Hygiene and Occupational Diseases (RISHOD). With 4.45 million inhabitants, Tashkent province is the country’s third-biggest and fastest growing province, surrounding the capital of the same name in the North East of Uzbekistan. Here, over 80 percent of the population is connected to the mains water supply, and 70 percent of households are equipped with a wastewater system. Although steps are taken to improve water supply, there are still not enough wastewater treatment plants, or water distribution systems. Many of the facilities that do exist were built in the 70s of the last century and require renovation and modernization by now.

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Number 35 Kastanienallee:
The Foundation's office in the south of Hanover.
The Foundation’s Purpose

The purpose of the Foundation is to support and advance the humanities and social sciences as well as science and technology in higher education and research.

(Statutes of the Volkswagen Foundation, § 2)

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The Foundation is committed to encouraging ambitious research across disciplinary, institutional, and national borders and to supporting creative researchers in breaking new ground.
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